

Conrad Jost Nickels

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”
-Robert Frost

Bursitis is acting up. Means there's a storm on the way. But you've been feeling a different storm coming. A *big* one. A *dangerous* one. Best to be getting prepared.

You've seen bad things come down before. Burnings at Salem. Plagues. More wars than you could shake a stick at, assuming you had a stick and wanted to shake it. But this is bigger. Bigger than anything you've felt in a long time. Big trouble on the horizon. Bigger than any you've seen in your four hundred years.

'Course, people don't know you've been around for that long. They know you've been around since the town was formed back in the 1860's, and people think you might be- at most- pushing a hundred and ten. They don't know the half of it.

You see, everyone has a power in them. A power to change the world simply by thinking about what they would want to change, and willing it into being. Some call it magic, some call it miracles. Whatever it is, anyone can do it. You just have to be trained in it. Learn how to focus your will. Learn to bring things through. When you were fourteen, you served as an apprentice for Ostlander Bern, who taught you everything you needed to know to pull that force from inside you and change the way things were.

He also explained to you that everyone who masters their ability must make a choice between order and chaos. That choice determines the course of your life. Those who choose order fight for justice and peace, for a strong people well led. Those who choose chaos fight for treachery and cowardice, for a weak people constantly bickering with each other. You wondered that anyone would choose the path of chaos. Bern explained to you that the will you imposed upon the world was impacted by the state of the world itself. In times of peace and prosperity, the mages of Order find their tasks easier and will more powerful, while mages of Chaos found it harder to impose their wills in any great way. Bern then asked you whether you thought Chaos or Order was stronger in the world today. He then pointed out that the mages of Order were bound by the rules of society, and did what was necessary to foster the greatest common good, while Chaos mages were bound by no rules and often acted in no interest but their own. The choice was up to you- the path of Order, a hard road to travel but leading to a better world for yourself and all, or the path of Chaos, an easy road to travel but leading nowhere. You chose Order, and from that was your life determined.

You spent three hundred years gallivanting across the globe. You fought for the Catholics in the Hundred's Year War, traveled to the East with a spice caravel, came to

the Caribbean as a pirate hunter, fought for the British Crown in the American War of Independence. Of course, you lost most of the battles you fought in, and most of wars you served in were lost causes, but you were fighting for order. For the continued state of things, rather than the fratricidal anarchy that followed these events.

And while you were aging, you never passed on. It is a simple matter for any mages to simply will themselves into immortality (at least for natural causes- had you taken a bullet to the head, all your will would have been for naught). The problem is that the body still continues to age. Luckily, Bern had taught to you a way to force your will upon your own body- the Spell of Reformation. This would allow you to reforge your body into any form you wished; usually that of a much younger version of yourself. The problem with it is that it takes a *lot* of will to do it; it's not the sort of thing you can do very often. In addition, if the moral climate of the area (or your actions) is not especially favorable, it can be ages before you can amass the power to cast it.

Which brings us to your current state of affairs. After the Revolution, you were nearly powerless. America, by its democratic nature, is a font of chaos. But given the situation in Europe, with the French Revolution followed by constant warfare, you could see no place to settle where there was any semblance of Order. So you wandered around America for the next seventy years, making your last Reformation into that of a sixteen-year old version of yourself in 1858.

You were living in Missouri, working as a farmhand. One day in 1860, while on a trip to St. Louis for supplies, you met Joseph Edwood. Edwood was the leader of a Mormon Church, and was looking to settle out west in the unclaimed territories, where he hoped he could escape persecution for his beliefs. You talked to his band of followers, and you could feel the Order excluding from them. They believed in a strict regimen of life, and followed a strong code of laws. Realizing this as your chance to find a haven from Chaos, you offered to join them. They gladly accepted, baptized you as a Mormon, and soon you were journeying off to the West.

Traveling through the West at times made you think that Moses had it easy. After all, God gave him a pillar of flame to guide him. Edwood's band, on the other hand, had nothing to guide them. You constantly found yourselves attacked by hostile Indians or hostile whites (being a Mormon apparently caused people to want to kill you as quickly as they could), and spent many months traveling through the frigid snows of the mountains or the incredible heats of the desert.

Finally, on May 3rd, 1861, one of Edwood's scouts reported that he had found a place to set up their township. It was a patch of land that was buffeted from the desert by a series of mesas, and a river ran underground. It was a place where you could set up a thriving town, completely self supplied, with no one to harass you within a hundred miles. It was perfect. Everyone quickly set up their camps, and Edwood christened it San Inguon Mormon Township, naming it after the river that was to be the town's lifeblood.

For the first few days, things were wonderful. Everyone worked together to set up houses and farms, and the Order from it wrapped around you like sweet bliss. But after a while, you started to feel that something was wrong. There was a taint to the land. Not one so strong that you could always feel it, but the sort of taint you only now and again caught glimpses of. Something was wrong here. Very wrong.

You were still puzzling over what it was that was unnerving you when the delegation of Indians arrived. Edwood came up to talk to them, and found that they did not speak English, and gestured for them to go away. You realized that they might know something about the taint, so you willed yourself to know their language. You introduced yourself, and they explained the problem that Edwood's people were going to be in.

It seems that the land you had settled on was the ancient resting ground of the Ceraphim. The Ceraphim, according to their lore, were imps devoted to causing havoc and mischief. Usually they would find a person and put suggestions into their mind, slowly turning that person into a caricature of themselves. By setting up town upon their resting ground, you were going to aggravate them and cause them to curse you.

You tried to explain the situation to Edwood. He laughed at you, claiming the Indians were just heathens, and that God would protect his children from the evils of pagans. Everyone else in town agreed with him, and people began to wonder if you were truly a devoted follower of God.

Well, when the frost killed off most of the crops, people started to worry that maybe you had been right. When the rain of frogs came, most people realized they were in trouble. When the plague hit town, everyone ran to you, begging you to do something to stop the catastrophes.

You talked to the Indian shaman and came to an impasse. By setting up town here, you had aroused the ceraphim. Leaving the area would simply cause the ceraphim to follow you. There was no way to remove the curse. But after long discussions of lore and magic theory, you came to a realization. The curse could not be lifted, but it could be moved. You could lift the curse from the entire town by focusing in upon a single family. You explained your plan to Edwood, and he agreed that it was the right thing to do. He called for volunteers to save the town. One man, Jebediah Sturvin, volunteered.

Jeb didn't volunteer purely out of the kindness of his heart. By offering to take the curse off the town and suffer it himself, he was able to convince most of the town to give him parts of their land and goods in return. He was going to suffer the curse, but he was going to suffer it as the richest man in San Inguon.

The ceremony to remove the curse was long and arduous. You and the Indian shaman worked all night and all day planning the ritual. Finally, devoting all the will you could, you cast the spell. And the plague ended. The frost receded. And there was no obvious effect to Jeb Sturvin. Everyone celebrated. Until the next full moon. At that point,

Jeb turned into a half-man half-wolf creature and began rampaging through town. Many people died that night, but still people were happy that it wasn't a plague or some such, and Jeb agreed to let himself be locked into a shed every full moon, thus averting most of the disasters.

But now you were tied to the town. No one else knew enough of magic to keep the wards in place (the shaman having left to join his people shortly after the ritual was complete). And you really didn't want to try and teach people the art. After all, you knew what God-fearing Christians had done to magic users back in Salem, and you were right in the middle of the most God-fearing Christians you had ever met.

So you stayed in town, setting up a little general store, which has prospered some. And you've seen San Inguon grow from a little Mormon settlement into a thriving little town. You've kept the curse from affecting anyone but the Sturvins (the lycanthropism apparently passes down to the next eldest male of the first line when the werewolf dies; sort of like the monarchy). All in all, you lead a very peaceful and quiet century.

And that's part of the problem. You see, you do gain a lot of will from a town in the throes of Order, much like San Inguon is. But America is still too chaotic a country for you to gain as much as you'd like. In addition, you know there is chaos out there that you can fight. You need to get out of San Inguon. You need to travel the world, see how things have changed, fight the encroaching chaos and bring order to this planet.

But first, you have to deal with this storm. You felt the first winds of it a couple of years ago. You woke up and felt that something was just *not right*. Chaos had snuck in during the night. You searched in vain for it, but found nothing out of the ordinary. Maybe it was just a change in the country. Maybe an anarchist had moved into town. But things still seemed normal on the surface, so you just let it slide, hoping it would go away.

But Saturday before last, you woke up in the middle of the night in terror. You could feel the waves of Chaos passing through you. You felt like the air around you had turned to water, and you were drowning in the Chaos that suffused through the town. Slowly, it dissipated, but you knew *something had changed*. Something is out there. Some force of Chaos, larger than any you have ever dealt with, has come to San Inguon. And you could feel the ripples behind it, of other forms of Chaos converging upon the town, riding in its wake. And while you have never felt the wave again, you can hear the Chaos in the air. A low, timorous buzz that drones in your ears. And every day since the wave, the sound has gotten louder. And you can feel that today will be the breaking point.

Today will be the day that Chaos tries to grab hold of San Inguon.

Stock Quote: "You know, back in my day, they would have caned you for doing something like that."

Mannerisms: You're the crotchety old man who runs the General Store. Complain about aches and pains a lot. Treat everyone like a kid. Make a real pain of yourself. But when Chaos rears its ugly head, take charge of the situation and beat it down.

People You Know:

J.D. Koln, Robert Sherman & Nick Kerensky: Little whippersnappers. Constantly causing trouble around town. They like to make you the butt of their pranks. Little snots.

Tony Turelli, Margaret Smith & Catherine Thomas: Something strange about those kids. You feel something is not right with them. They seem all right on the surface, through.

Mark Sturvin: Poor kid. When his father passes on, he'll get the full effects of the curse. When he's older, you'll have to explain it to him.

Mayor Cunningham: Town mayor. Greasy little slimeball. He'll do anything to get elected. He knows that Harold Sturvin is the werewolf; every mayor is told that. Luckily, since the Sturvin family is one of the biggest campaign backers in the state, no mayor has ever done anything about it.

Sheriff Ward Barnes: A nice enough man, but he has no idea of what forces are really at work trying to destroy this town. He knows about Sturvin's curse as well.

Dr. Randall Rourke: Town doctor. Almost a kid. It's insulting to take advice from someone that young.

Ivan Kerensky: Runs the gas station in town. Emanates a great deal of Order.

Dr. Angela Bailey: An archeologist here to investigate the burial grounds outside of town. You'd better make sure she doesn't disturb anything that could unleash the ceraphim. Keep a stern eye on her.

Goals:

1. Prevent Chaos, cause Order. Keep things running smoothly. Derail any attempts to destroy the natural Order of San Inguon. Play guardian angel to the town.

2. Cast the Spell of Reformation. Christ, your body feels old. As well it should; you're one hundred and sixteen. Save up as much willpower as you can so that you can cast the spell. See Magic Bluesheet for details.

3. Get out of town. You want to see the world, find wrongs and right them, keep order, that sort of thing. Staying here in San Inguon makes it hard to go out and crusade. In order to leave town, you'll need to cast the Spell of Reformation (see goal #2), and find an apprentice. The apprentice needs to be someone who will stay here for a long time so they can keep the ritual going. Needless to say, you'll have to be circumspect in finding someone to train with you- most people would consider you loopy, and some might know enough of magic to consider you an enemy. After all, the Chaos building up is unlikely to be by accident. The last thing you need is to take someone into your complete confidences, only to find out that they have already chosen the path of Chaos. That happened with Aaron Burr during the war. It was a bad thing, and you almost didn't get out alive. (See the Magic Bluesheet for rules upon training apprentices.)

Mana: 9923. You've been saving up for a *long* time. We're not going to give you the 9900. I think you'd appreciate that as well. But should ever you run out and need more, feel free to ask a GM. He'll give you some of your reserve. Just remember that it'll take 10000 to cast the Spell of Reformation.