

# ALWYN'S EMPIRE – THE GRIMOIRE

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## SYNOPSIS

“The Grimoire,” Book One of the *Alwyn's Empire* series, provides the reader with an introduction to the Empire and its inhabitants. The Empire is a lush expanse of snow-capped mountains, dense forests and fertile plains, completely surrounded by a high wall. Outside the Wall lies an apparently endless stretch of desert wasteland, but no one knows because no one is the least bit interested in scaling the Wall and exploring the unknown.

The Empire is divided politically into ten provinces, six of which are held by ancestral families, or Houses [see map]. One of these is House Falconus, the master of which is Alwyn. “The Grimoire” begins as Alwyn inspects a sheet of parchment which he has found in an ancient astrological codex. The parchment is written in unrecognizable characters and symbols so he shows it to Janis, a historian familiar with pre-empire legends and myths. Janis suggests that the parchment may be a page from a book which deals with magic—a “grimoire.” Janis also warns that if magic really exists, then delving into its mysteries may have disastrous effects.

Alwyn has the parchment page but he doesn't have the grimoire it was torn from. He does have the astrological codex he found it in, so he and his wife Elspeth visit Talia Cartagia, who sold him the codex. Talia remembers the grimoire, but it has mysteriously vanished—someone else is interested in discovering the secrets of magic.

That someone is Refa Pondrane, Master of House Pondrane. The grimoire will do him no good, however, because it is written in code and the parchment in Alwyn's possession contains the key to its decryption. Lord Refa is known throughout the Empire as a cruel House Master. His goal is to become emperor, but to accomplish this he must overthrow the current ruler, Empress Deronn. Magic could be another weapon in his arsenal so he kidnaps Elspeth and offers to return her in exchange for the parchment. Alwyn's small personal militia is no match for Refa's so Alwyn agrees to the exchange, but Elspeth manages to escape so the grimoire and parchment are kept separate for the moment.

Shortly after Elspeth is reunited with Alwyn, they receive a map from an unknown sender. The map appears to be of an area outside the Wall. Although it piques their interest, they have no time to pursue it because they are the hosts of the Empire's annual Festival of Flowers—a pagan celebration of spring. One visitor to the festival is Inara, Talia Cartagia's daughter. She brings with her a miniature gold dagger, which she presents to Alwyn as a gift. Suspecting that Talia was the sender of the mysterious map, they compare the map and the dagger and discover that a symbol on the map matches the miniature dagger. The symbol points the way to the Empire's mining district, so after the conclusion of the festival, Alwyn and Elspeth decide to investigate.

Anticipating Refa's outrage at Elspeth's escape, Alwyn has prepared a counterfeit parchment and left it in plain sight. While they are in the mining district, one of Refa's agents steals the phony parchment and delivers it to Refa. Refa soon realizes that it's counterfeit and he is so angry that he decides that magic or no magic, his militia will march on House Falconus, slaughter Alwyn and Elspeth, then continue its march to Imperial City and overthrow Empress Deronn. He appoints one Beliar as captain of his militia, but he's unaware that Beliar is one of Deronn's agents.

Meanwhile, in the mining district, Alwyn, Elspeth and Inara follow Talia's map and find themselves at an ancient suspension bridge, across which is a door set in a sheer rock cliff. The door is made of the same unknown substance as the Wall, and has no knobs or handles. Inara

discovers a small slot, and when the miniature dagger is inserted in the slot, the door swings open and reveals a tunnel. At the end of the tunnel is a huge cavern containing thousands of books, so old that they predate the Empire. The books are written in a language not unlike their own but the words make little sense, but they contain images of vast cities with castles which reach to the clouds, carriages with no horses, and machines which fly through the air like birds. Do these wonders still exist somewhere outside the Wall, or did they crumble into dust before the founding of the Empire?

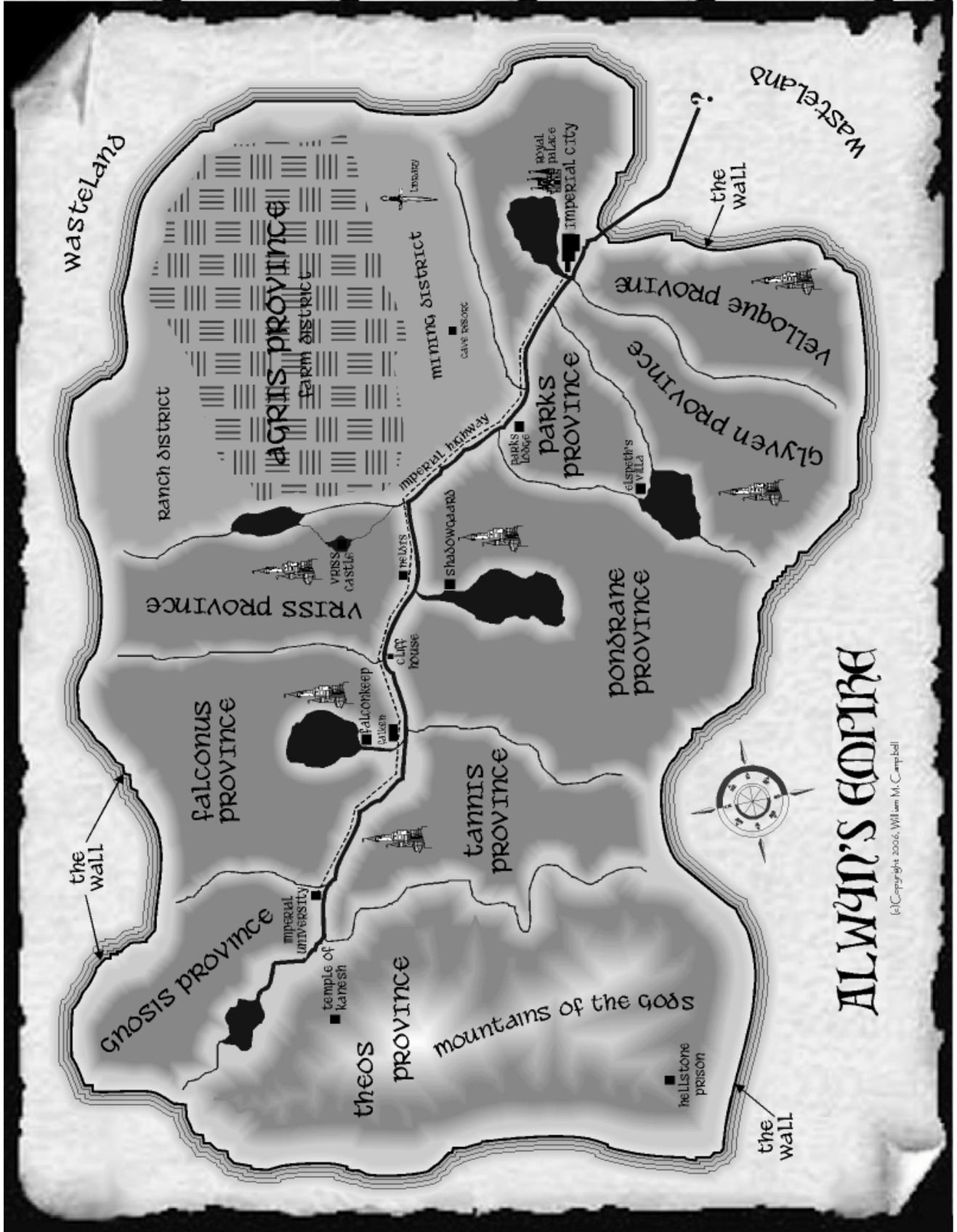
As Lord Refa prepares to march on House Falconus and the Royal Palace, Beliar manages to get word to Deronn and Alwyn's chamberlain Bunthorne. He also divides Refa's militia into two parts—a small one to set burn Alwyn's castle to the ground, and a larger one to take out the Imperial Army. Bunthorne manages to locate Alwyn's carriage, which is making its way back along the Imperial Highway; the coachman applies the whip and they return to the castle just in time to capture Refa's would-be arsonists, who are turned over to the Sheriff of Falconus Province.

Refa's main militia arrives at Imperial City and finds the sidewalks thronged with young girls wearing spring frocks and frilly bonnets. As the militia parades down Imperial Parkway toward the Royal Palace, the little girls throw flowers and kisses to the soldiers. But when the militia reaches the palace gates, the flowers become rocks. The soldiers are unwilling to hurt little girls so the militia is quickly reduced to chaos. Refa has no compunctions concerning little girls, however; he scoops one up by her neck and is about to run her through with his sword when a rock knocks him off his horse. When he regains his senses, the cute little girl is hovering over his face with a large rock in her hand; he opens his mouth to protest, which is a big mistake. The now-toothless Refa is paraded before Empress Deronn in leg irons and is remanded to the Lord High Chancellor of the Imperial Chancery, and thus ends Refa's coup. For the moment.

Alwyn and Elspeth make plans to move the thousands of books from the cavern to their summer villa and to assemble a team of scholars to study them, and Elspeth takes time to study the grimoire, which has been recovered from Refa's castle. She discovers that the strange parchment torn from the grimoire contains two parts. One is the key which decrypts the grimoire, which turns out to be nothing more than an ancient copy of the Book of Kanesh (the empire's religious canon) and has nothing to do with magic, other than the religious sort.

The other part of the parchment, however, describes a "Crystal Castle" hidden in the mountains of Gnosis Province—a portal or gateway which leads to a place outside the Wall. Will Alwyn and Elspeth discover vast cities with castles which reach to the clouds and machines which fly through the air like birds? "The Grimoire" ends with Alwyn's preparations to find the so-called "Crystal Castle," with one footnote: Lord Refa has escaped from Hellstone Prison and is out for revenge. Book Two continues the tales of *Alwyn's Empire*.

Although the Alwyn's Empire series is meant to be a (somewhat) serious fantasy, it contains much humor and occasionally pokes fun at traditional fantasies, religion, the Church, and politics. The Empire has its own set of laws and morals which may not coincide with those of other universes; the author neither condones nor condemns its inhabitants' behavior.



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