

# A Snippet

By Holly Lisle

The set-up for this – it's just a transitional piece, but it shows the effects of big magic a long way away, and the way worlds in the Sentinels' universe connect. And it was fun to write, so I'm posting it here.

*The old gods had not gone to war with the dark gods in time out of mind. The worldchain had forgotten the price paid for wars between gods.*

*Abruptly, with huge spells of horror and death bursting on the Dalchi fields, rebound magic poured upworld, and ...*

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*... on Niiadaa, on a deliciously warm afternoon with the clouds towering like castles above the village of Iri, the earth rumbled without warning and ripped itself apart. Molten rock exploded upward. Fire rained up, spurted, gouted, and the village died in a breath, taking everyone with it. A hill bellied up out of the ground, red fire racing out in all directions, and a mountain shouldered its way onto the hill, shoving rivers of rock and crusts and scabs of lava before it. Poisons poured into the air, and the sky turned black, and still the earth kept shaking. The sun vanished, and the forests and the rivers all around with it – lakes sucked back into the earth as if they had never existed, and death spread out in all directions. Seas rose out of their beds and smashed shorelines, pounding them with forty-foot waves and tossing chunks of lava bigger than houses as if they were toys.*

*The sun would not shine again on Niiadaa for weeks – and the snow would start falling in mere days ...*

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*... while on Povreak, a hurricane that had been moving well off the shore of the most populated coastline suddenly turned inland. It crawled northward, strong and well-defined and vicious, and laid waste to whole peoples and the better part of a nation ...*

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*... clouds. More clouds. The peoples of the drought-stricken flatlands of Central Hwyr on Cadwa looked up in startled gratitude. Thunder rumbled, which had not been heard in those parts in a dozen years, and moist air curled the dust along the ground and touch cheeks with the gentle promise of rain.*

*The first drops spattered, big as fists, and people cheered, and stood with arms outstretched and faces upturned. Then the skies let loose.*

*But the ground, too parched to drink the bounty it received, filled fast, and flooded fast, and joy turned to horror as torrents ripped across the plains, taking topsoil and houses and livestock and people with them ...*

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*... across Oria's northern forests, the sound of rattling wings, individually no louder than the crinkling of a sheet of paper, grew to a roar as millions of millions of cherik beetles hatched after a hibernation of twice a hundred years. Starving, they launched themselves into the sky and swarmed on everything green and growing. Tender plants, budding out, were stripped bare in minutes and the clouds of beetles ascended again and moved on.*

*The plague would last a month, and then the cheriks would dig back into the earth, so deep that men could never find them*

*to destroy them, and lay their eggs, and die.*

*Behind them, much of the northern world would starve that year ...*

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*Across the globe, observatories went crazy as out of nowhere, asteroids swarmed, ripping through satellites and exploding secret geosynchronous listening posts and smashing in toward earth, trailing debris and fire and destruction.*

*Newscasters rocketed toward their chairs, makeup-less and in shirt-sleeves, cigarettes dangling from their mouths, to shout at the cameras in a thousand languages, "We have just been informed that Earth has moved into an unmarked asteroid belt, and we are being bombarded by meteors. Remain calm ... most of these will burn up in the atmosphere –"*

*But many did not. Some of the meteorites hit like exploding bombs, taking scyscrapers and their inhabitants, hitting with freakish perversion on one person standing in line at a bus stop but missing the ones to either side, and slamming into the ground with such force that the earth shook and the people spared a direct hit were shattered by the shock.*

*Enemies eyed each other suspiciously across borders, suspecting foul play – but not one continent in the world escaped unscathed.*

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*... and the magic moved upworld even farther, through Kerras and Frejandur and even Jerrits – but those worlds lay dead and empty, with no one to care about fresh disasters.*