

Septerra Core: The Lost Novelization

By David Martina

Copyright

Septerra Core: The Lost Novelization © 1996-2020 Brian Babendererde & Alisa Kober. All rights reserved.

From the archives of Valkyrie Studios.

For information about the making of *Septerra Core: Legacy of the Creator*, please visit www.twilighttangents.com.

Introduction - July 2020

Septerra Core: Legacy of the Creator was developed by Valkyrie Studios and released in 1999. But that's far from the whole story. The game originally began development in 1995 at a company called Viacom New Media (VNM).

The leadership at VNM's Chicago office was very interested in finding ways to license their games to other media, such as comic books, film, action figures, and books. *Septerra Core*, with its original world and intricate story, was a perfect fit for this sort of cross promotion, and what would be better than an epic fantasy novelization? We just needed to find someone to write it.

Several people at the company with writing backgrounds were invited to share samples of their work. One of those people was Dave Martina. But Dave decided to go big or go home. Instead of supplying samples, why not pen a fully-realized chapter of a proposed *Septerra Core* book?

What you're about read is that sample chapter, dated September, 1996. That date bears some perspective: Dave was working on this chapter not just three years before the game was released, but when it was still in an early stage of development. I had a first draft of the script ready, but in late '96 much of the game only existed as concept art and early game models. Very little game play was up and running. Despite all that, Dave jumped right in. He

grabbed a bunch of the art, a copy of the story synopsis and script, and picked my brain for as many details as he could.

Somehow he turned all that into something that felt fully-formed, something that would capture the mood and feel of this epic new fantasy world we were creating.

Remember that no voice actors had been cast (and wouldn't be for several years), yet, here's Maya, Grubb, Uncle, the Mayor, Doskias, even the workbots, and they just feel right. I can easily hear each of the game's voice actors speaking these lines, even when Dave imbues them with his own brand of "junker slang!"

That's quite a feat.

I hope you'll enjoy being transported back to the marvelous, strange world of *Septerra Core*, presented here much as Dave had written it in 1996, with very minimal editing on my part.

Brian BMAN Babendererde

Lead Designer, *Septerra Core: Legacy of the Creator*

Chapter One

“...A time of war will come. A false prophet will rise to power and threaten the very existence of Septerra, but a savior will come. One with great strength and much wisdom will defeat the false prophet...but not before many are suffered to die. With the vanquishing of the false prophet the One will be forced to decide. On that decision will rest the fate of Septerra.”

-The Prophecies of Marduk, Book 15, “Judgment and Revelation.”

The swarm of imperial battleships banked in unison as they whirled around the towering spires of Aspertine’s palace. Thousands of meters below, their docking ports gaped open like hungry mouths amid the forests of conic biotech living quarters and workspaces. Each cluster of ports was fed by the swirling and pulsing loom of bio-ducting that converged at the foundation of the palace. Responding collectively, the ships suddenly stopped their forward motion and began floating slowly towards the capital city's pulsing derma. Yet, even as the biotech flotilla sank through the surface to rearm and resupply, another sortie of the massive vessels belched out of their lairs and soared up into the bright skies.

Visible from anywhere in the sprawling city below, the palace stood above the Chosen capital skyline like a vigilant sentinel. From within the gnarled exoskeleton of the palace, Aspertine and the Chosen lords ruled the Septerran outer shell, and it was there, within the pulsing walls of the Emperor's court, that Lord Doskias stood vehemently arguing for the validity of his most remarkable and inconceivable scheme.

“Lord Doskias,” Gunnar’s voice boomed in the vast space of the royal courtroom. “What you suggest is outright heresy!” Despite the immensity of the chamber there was little echo to amplify his embittered reproach, for the membrane of which the spine matrix, the palace, and the capital city were made reflected little sound from its fleshy surface.

“Marduk, son of the Creator, saw it fit that we should find the artifacts, and now that we have them we must use them as He intended,” Gunnar said sharply. “To do otherwise is to presume our knowledge greater than His—is that what you are suggesting with your impertinent theories?” A murmur of assent rose from the assembly.

Sustained by the living conduits that bound his ancient body to his bio-throne, Aspertine looked out over his court as he floated high above the black, yawning entrance to the spine matrix. His dark and ancient eyes moved slowly from figure to figure while he polled the responses of his courtiers. Squared off against each other along the ridged and plated isle, Doskias and Gunnar dominated the assembly. Doskias stood dark and defiant at the center of his omnipresent retinue. He was flanked by his lover and compatriot, Lady Cassandra, whose feline beauty did little to mask her ruthless and deadly nature. She eyed Gunnar predatorily and appeared anxious and incensed. Also with Doskias were the incorporeal and mysterious trio known only as “The Three.” They floated around Doskias and advised him in eerie, barely audible whispers.

Opposite Doskias was Gunnar in his flowing robes and studded epaulets. Aspertine was pleased with Gunnar’s position that it was wrong to rush the prophecy, and he took no small comfort in knowing

that the strong and crafty lord had allied himself with the empire. Gunnar had set his ruggedly handsome face into a challenging sneer to further taunt and provoke his longtime enemy. Standing solemnly next to Gunner, Markham peered out at the assemblage from beneath his leather hood and exhibited obvious displeasure on his battle-hardened face over Doskias' scheme. At Aspertine's right was his daughter, the young and beautiful Princess Alisa. Her normally bright and happy mood was uncharacteristically grim, and her wide, liquid eyes and high cheekbones seemed to sag as her anxiety over Doskias' scheme grew.

The mood throughout the court had become dark and uneasy. Aspertine knew that his people would not be easily won over by Doskias. Yet, by the wisdom of his age, Aspertine knew that Doskias would not be easily dissuaded from his megalomaniacal plan. He glared at Doskias' dark figure standing proud and defiant in front of the court and tightly clutched at the armrests of the throne with his long, gnarled fingers. Then, slowly, he raised his ancient hand to signal that he was about to speak, and the court grew silent.

"It is my opinion," he began, "that the discovery of the artifacts bestows upon us an awesome responsibility. The ability to communicate with the Core through them is a responsibility that must be carefully and thoughtfully regarded before any action is taken. The Prophecies tell us that there is much to be gained through the proper and fitting use of the artifacts, but I fear that there is far more to be lost should we proceed too hastily. Many thousands of years ago the Creator fashioned the Core and the Spine Matrix. Then he designed the shells and their motions so that precisely every one hundred years light would reach the Core and power the

engine from which Septerra draws its life. So it was made, and so it has been for these many millennia.” The wizened sovereign paused momentarily and then solemnly turned to Doskias. “This being so, I remain puzzled, Lord Doskias. Why, after so many thousands of years, must we now be compelled to rush the natural cycle that He created?”

Before Doskias could respond, Gunner interjected. “And how do you propose to bring about the convergence, Doskias? Do you intend to bring your awesome will to bear on Marduk himself?”

The Three swirled and weaved around Doskias like wisps of smoke. He nodded in agreement and scowled in anger as they advised him in their clandestine whispers.

“You would do well to mind your impudent tongue, Lord Gunner,” Doskias growled dangerously. “I am the direct blood descendant of Marduk, Son of the Creator, and it is my destiny to fulfill the prophecy. If I choose to bring about the convergence, then I shall do so. If I have to step over your corpse to do it, then that will suit my purpose as well.”

“Why do you talk so easily of corpses, Lord Doskias?” questioned Markham when he could bear Doskias’ disregard for life no longer. “I don’t pretend to be your match in prophetic scholarship, but I very much doubt that it was Marduk’s intent that lives should be sacrificed to bring about the convergence. How many lives will need to be vanquished to achieve your ends, and how can you be sure that those lives will not be a vain sacrifice?”

“Yes, tell us more about your plan Lord Doskias,” sneered Gunner. “Tell us how you will collapse time and bring the future to the present.”

Bristling at the insult to her ally, Cassandra pivoted toward Gunner and shifted her hand to the hilt of the razor-edged saber hanging at her waist. Doskias signaled for her to hold with a barely perceptible hand signal. Grudgingly, she released her grip on the weapon, but she never broke her deadly serpentine stare at Gunnar, who regarded the threat calmly for a long, tense moment.

“Gentlemen!” Princess Alisa’s strong, young voice broke the thickening tension. She scowled at the bickering lords, her doe-like eyes hardened, and she set her jaw firmly to reinforce the authority in her young voice. “It would make far more sense to discuss this issue in a less antagonistic manner. Aren’t we all interested in the same things here? Don’t we all commonly wish for the safety and prosperity of Septerra? We must bind together and work for what is best for all Septerrans, and we can’t do that if we let our differences from the past interfere with the decisions that lie before us.” Having said that, she crossed her arms as a gesture of closure and triumph.

Doskias eyed Gunnar through heavy, deadly lids. In his mind he saw Gunnar’s broken corpse lying at his feet, but he knew that that particular pleasure would have to wait for a more opportune time.

I will make you regret your insolence, Gunner, he thought to himself. But there is no time to deal with the insignificance of your destruction until after my game is played.

Doskias turned slowly to face the throne.

“My plan,” he addressed Aspertine with an obviously forced calm, “will bring light to the Core and allow me, as the prophecies demand, to reveal the secrets of the Legacy. We can know the secrets of the Legacy in days, not decades.” He had been

conspicuously disregarding the others in the room as he spoke with Aspertine, but then Doskias turned and addressed the entire assembly: “Know this, court of Aspertine. In the Prophecies, Marduk tells us that one will come who will solve the riddle of the Core so that all its truths may be revealed. He also tells us that the One will be directly descended from His bloodline. I am that descendant. Marduk's very blood flows in my veins, and so it is my destiny to solve the riddle of the Prophecies. So it is said by Marduk, and so it shall be.”

Doskias whirled on his heels and strode angrily toward the door to the great hall closely followed by Cassandra and the swirling Three. When he reached the portal, he turned and glowered angrily at Aspertine and his court. The Three weaved frantically around Doskias in tight loops. He listened to them for a moment, then inhaled deeply and again addressed the court:

“I am the one who was foretold in the ancient Prophecies. It is my destiny to commune with Marduk, and so I shall,” he spat menacingly. Then, his voice crescendoing, he roared, “I will not tolerate interference by bureaucrats, misguided zealots, or cowards hiding behind the wooden shield of petty politics. Do not attempt to interdict my legacy. This is my final and only warning. I will not be denied.”

With that pronouncement Doskias swept through the door followed by his small attaché. The court exploded into a frenzied jumble of speculative conversations and worried debate when he had gone. Aspertine felt cold fingers of fear and foreboding creep into his consciousness as he looked down at the panicked and frenetic scene.

The hot, acrid dust rode piggyback on the zephyr that tore into the three tiny figures as they inched their way across the flatlands. Step by step they trudged across the barren kilometers that separated them from the security of the cranes, scattered scrap heaps, and spewing smokestacks of Junk City. They traveled silently, lost in their own thoughts, for the winds easily drowned out all but the loudest shouts. Then above the shriek of the storm an ominous noise arose, deeper and more menacing than the howling wind. In the distance, the first of several colossal biotech battleships crested the horizon.

The walking traveler motioned with a rag-draped arm to her companion, who was perched high on the back of a sleek, robotic quadruped. She was pointing toward the shelter of a wind-carved rock formation, but the mounted traveler stared with dumb fascination at the enormous floating vessels. He gaped in amazement at their biotech construction and longed for a chance to examine one closely. Dreamily, he admired the curving sweep of the fuselage and pondered the physics that allowed such massive creatures to float. The pedestrian traveler was already halfway to the rock shelter when she realized that her companion wasn't coming. She sprinted back, yanked him down off his mount and shoved him toward the cave. He grudgingly complied and regained his balance while he stared with mute awe over his shoulder at the imperial flotilla. Finally, he surrendered his curiosity to the danger, and together the trio huddled in the cave and waited for the ships to pass.

“We’ve got to get out of here and flap Uncle about this,” whispered Maya as she peeled the dust-coated scarf from around her head. She peeked out from under the outcropping and scanned the russet skies with her clear, bright eyes. The sandstorm had calmed significantly with the passing of the monstrous ships, and now a light desert breeze stirred the young women’s long, cornsilk-colored ponytail. “The ships are gone,” said Maya in a relieved voice. “And the storm is about over. C’mon! Let’s go before it spins up again.”

“Runner’ll get us there,” Grubb offered. “I put a full charge on his dynopacks this morning. He can get us home in a split.” Maya smiled as the lanky tech-o proudly padded Runner’s head. The bot purred metallically and crouched near its owner.

Grubb coaxed Runner out of the rock shelter into the hazy, dusty daylight. The robot moved slowly, hesitant to expose his works to more of the corrosive, blowing sand. His joints creaked and wined from the grit impacted in his old servos. Then, when he was finally clear of the cave, Runner stretched out to his full height before crouching to allow his master to mount. In a smooth motion Grubb slid into his seat and pulled his goggles over his eyes. Maya looked up at him and suppressed a grin as she noticed, once again, how insectile they made him look. Then she stepped up onto the running board and tightly grabbed the roll bar behind the driver’s saddle.

“Hang on!” Grubb shouted as he tapped Runner gently on the hindquarters. With a clank, the robot began steadily loping westward in the direction of Junk City. A few moments later Grubb slapped Runner’s metallic haunches harder, and the robot began a smooth

canter. The desert sped by as the three headed towards the safety and comfort of Junk City.

As they rode, Maya looked out across the vast desert. She found the steady rolling motion as Runner loped across the barren sands calming. The light from the outer shell cast its warming glow on the wasteland and Maya found herself reflecting about life there. In the distance she could see the outer shell hanging like a giant cloud over Junk City. It seemed somehow serene and peaceful despite the ever-present threat from The Chosen fleets. She watched as a cloud of scrap rained down on Junk City from the floating continent above. Ragged pieces of metal plummeted out of the sky and crashed into an already mountainous pile of scrap. Although the scrap provided by the Chosen was the primary means of sustenance for the Junkers, something about the casualness and irregularity of the scrap dumps bothered her. She pondered it for a bit longer and then lost herself in the stark beauty of the passing desert.

Hours later in the late afternoon light, the three scavengers approached the sprawling boundaries of Junk City and stood silhouetted against the city's vast skyline. To the north, the Factory sprawled like a huge spider resting in the center of the giant pipe and ductwork web that formed the hub of the sprawling industrial metropolis. Massive cranes fed the insatiable appetite of the Factory, day and night, with ton after ton of scrap metal dropped from the shell above. Everywhere young Junkers scrambled over the heaps of scrap, taking little notice of the travelers.

Runner creaked to a stop in front of Junker's Headquarters, and Maya jumped down from the robot's back. The puff of red dust

rose from where her feet impacted the ground as her gaze locked on the Factory. The sheer height of the magnificent, soaring building caused her gaze to travel upwards to the bottom of the Chosen realm. She found herself wondering once again what the outer shell must be like, and for a long moment she indulged her fantasy. Then she drifted back to reality and slowly turned to take in her own world. All she could see was the vast scavenger site teeming with Junkers crawling in and out looking for precious scrap. The squeak from Runner's sand-laden gears snapped Maya from her trance-like reverie, and she saw that Grubb had already turned Runner towards home. He was about to slap the robots' haunches to begin the journey, but Maya reached up and stopped his hand.

"Come in and flap with Uncle," Maya pleaded. "He asks about you all the time, and you know how much he loves company."

"Zero hope. I have to clean and lube Runner's servos and drive mechanism. Then I have collecting for the Factory to do. Next time...or the time after that," Grubb said doubtfully.

"Are you sure...Please? Just for a split?" Maya implored.

"Next time...promise," he assured, and firmly slapped Runner's haunch. With a creaky, grinding crunch the robot began lumbering toward home. Maya stood watching and waving until Grubb and Runner disappeared around a large scrap heap. When he was gone, she turned towards the Junker's Headquarters building and began searching for Uncle.

She picked her way through wreckage in the work area with an instinctual ease while she called out for her foster guardian. The yard was a tangle of ancient rusty metal parts and pieces, but each of the lithe girl's steps was sure and solid. Out of the corner of her eye she

caught a sudden flash of motion and whipped her eyes around to follow it like a predatory bird. A shock of wiry hair flashed past behind a pile of rusted gears. She swiveled to follow, and leapt across the tops of heaps with fluid grace. Her quarry scuttled through a small port in the side of the Headquarters building. From the tiny hole came a tinkling, childish giggling. Maya stood outside, perturbed, her arms crossed on her chest.

“Tori. Come out—NOW!” Maya commanded maternally. “I don't have time to mess around. I need to flap with Uncle right now. Have you seen him?”

A small, bristly head peeked out from the gloom behind the wall. The eyes blinked repeatedly and glowed in the darkness.

“Please, Tori,” Maya begged in an attempt to coax the young Junker out. “I have to find Uncle now. If you know where he is you better tell me.”

“What will you give me if I help you?” He asked. “Give me your boots. I want your boots. I'll tell you where Uncle is if you give me your boots.”

“Never mind,” Maya said, feigning disappointment. “I'll find him myself.”

She turned on her heel and headed around the building. In moments, the impudent young boy had slipped out of the hole and come to heel alongside her. He struggled to keep up with her rapid pace and long stride.

“Okay, five bits. I'll tell you for five bits.” Tori, as always, continued his bartering. Maya ignored the young hustler's attempts at extortion, and soon, as they arrived at the entrance of Junker's Headquarters, the boy's curiosity overcame his mercantile instincts.

“What's so important Maya? Huh? What are you going to tell Uncle? Did you see something out in the flatlands? What did you see? Tell me!” Tori's rapid-fire questions brought a smile to Maya's face. She slowed a bit and patted Tori on the shoulder. The boy smiled up at her, and she hugged him maternally for a moment.

“Come on. Uncle is in the kitchen making bread. I'll race you for five bits!” The boy took off running and giggling. Maya followed at a trot, and together they burst through the door, laughing.

“I won,” panted Tori breathlessly. “I'm the Lord of the Heap and you owe me five bits!”

The pair stood giggling and bickering just inside the doorway to a kitchen outfitted quite adequately and dusted most thoroughly with gray flower. Behind the counter in front of them a squat, flour-covered man kneaded a gray lump of dough with his meaty fingers. The man looked up from his task and raised his eyebrows ever so slightly in the direction of the childish laughter. Maya and Tori quieted and stood still instantly.

“What's all this noise about? Are you in trouble again Tori?” The old man's deep, throaty voice resonated through the room.

“Uncle,” Maya started breathlessly. “While Grubb and I were out junking today we saw imperial battleships, more than a dozen. We hid under rocks, so I don't think they saw us.” She paused to regain her breath. “I'm afraid, Uncle. Why are they here again?” Maya grew more anxious as she watched Uncle's warm smile fade into a grim line of grave concern. He ceased his kneading and waddled to his well-used stool where he sat and ran a flour-coated palm across his dusty, bald head and then stroked his powdered chin. The children stood quietly while the old man contemplated.

After several minutes Tori could no longer contain himself. "What are you so afraid of, Maya? The ships were way out in the wastelands, and they didn't even see you. You said so. Isn't that right Uncle? There's nothing to be afraid of is there?" Tori asked hopefully.

"Being afraid isn't going to be of any use, but Maya's right to be concerned," Uncle reasoned. "The last time the ships came was when Maya was about your age. Two of the Chosen warlords, Doskias and Gunnar, used our city for their battleground. When they were through Gunnar was defeated, and Maya's parents, along with nearly every adult in Junk City, were dead. Now we are a city of orphans and elders. It has taken us years to rebuild after that battle, and we don't want to do it again." Uncle motioned for the children to come to him, and when they did he hugged them close.

After several minutes Uncle pronounced: "These ships are a sign that war is coming. If that's right than all of Septerra is in danger. Describe the ships to me, Maya. Tell me whose crest they..."

The old man's words were cut off by a sudden bustle and commotion as the Mayor of Junk City burst into the kitchen with a patrol of robot guards. The heavily armored and weaponed guards bumped and jostled each other as they came to loose order behind the Mayor. Their metallic bulk quickly filled the large kitchen as they squeezed closely behind the tiny bureaucrat.

"Search the building. They're hiding in here somewhere." From beneath his smooth, overhanging brow, the Mayor shouted commands to his robotic cadre.

"Good day, Uncle. Good day, Miz Maya and young Tori," the lead guard said with a congenial and slightly metallic voice. The three meter tall, yellow and black striped automaton bent down to

look closely at Uncle and the children and said cheerfully, "It's a pleasure to see you again. My sensors indicate that the bread in the oven smells delicious."

The other guards nodded their heads in agreement and began chatting amongst themselves about how pleasurable the bread would be to their taste sensors. The Mayor's face flushed red, and his brow creased into a network of angry wrinkles.

"Enough!" He shrieked. "We're not here to eat lunch, we're here to find and arrest smugglers. Now search this building and find those criminals." The Mayor's chest heaved as he shouted orders at the robots, who looked at him with blank expressions of robotic contempt. Then all but the largest guard obediently began turning the Junker's Headquarters into a shambles. Every pot, jar, crate, trunk, drawer, closet, and box was emptied and shredded with mechanical precision. The Mayor surveyed the scene while cowering behind the metal skirts of his personal bodyguard. Uncle moved toward the Mayor in protest, but the robot raised his weapon and grinned apologetically as he pointed it at Uncle. The mayor cowered behind the robot's leg, and Uncle stood his ground but advanced no farther.

"You have no right to come in here and destroy our property," Uncle boomed. The authority and intensity of his words caused the Mayor to retreat farther behind his protector.

"I know you're hiding arms smugglers in with your Junkers, and when I find them I'm going to arrest you all," the obstinate little politician whined.

"You're a fool," protested Uncle. "I couldn't hide smugglers here. I deal directly with the Factory."

The Mayor stood dumbly contemplating the truth of what Uncle was saying when, one by one, having completed their search with precision and cold efficiency, the robot guards returned—empty-handed.

“Don't think this is over,” squealed the Mayor. “I know they're around here somewhere, so I'm just going to keep coming back until I catch them. I won't give up until...” The pathetic little bureaucrat continued his ineffectual ranting and squealing as the guards came to order around him. “Come along,” he snarled at the patrol. “We have smugglers to find.”

“Goodbye, Miz Maya. Goodbye, Uncle. Have a wonderful day, and please pass our greetings along to master Grubb,” said the robot leader pleasantly enough as he led the milling robots toward the door.

“Enough dammit,” squealed the Mayor. “I'm your master now, not that crazy hermit that built you, and I don't have time to wait around while you fraternize with suspects. Now let's go.” He whirled obstinately on his heels and scuttled toward the door. Smiling, waving, and occasionally jostling each other as they left, the robots followed the Mayor out into the gloomy dusk of the second shell.

Uncle turned his back and surveyed the destruction wrought by the intruders. He spoke to no one in particular when he said in a tired voice, “Order comes from chaos. Peace comes from war. If I could choose, I would choose chaos over war, order over peace.” He paused briefly and then smiled with tired eyes at Maya. “Come on, Maya. Help me bring order to this chaos.” Then he bent and began sorting through the mess.

It occurred to Uncle that Tori had disappeared sometime during the search. He made a mental note to add to the child's chores the next day for failing to pitch in.

Afterword

Many fans of the game will note that this lost chapter contains Lady Cassandra, a Chosen ally and lover of Lord Doskias. Alas, Cassandra, along with many other characters, designs, and gameplay elements wound up on the cutting room floor. To learn more about these lost concepts, the making of the game, and the story of how it left Viacom to finish development at Valkyrie Studios, check out my [20th anniversary, multi-part retrospective at TwilightTangents.com](http://www.TwilightTangents.com).

Thanks for reading!

-BMAN