

Disciples of Igir - The Book

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From Desolation to Prosperity

The Cataclysmic Birth (0 - 300)

Continental Beginning

The formation of Igir began with the most violent natural event recorded in planetary history—a supervolcanic eruption beneath the ocean’s surface. For centuries, the deep waters were still, but tectonic shifts and mounting pressure within the earth’s mantle eventually culminated in a catastrophic upheaval. The eruption unleashed an incomprehensible volume of magma, ash, and molten rock, reshaping the seafloor into an expanse of fiery destruction.

For nearly 300 years, the supervolcano’s continuous activity drove the creation of a new landmass. Towering plumes of smoke filled the sky, casting the surrounding seas in an eerie, perpetual twilight. As the magma cooled and solidified, it formed jagged cliffs and craggy landscapes dotted with volcanic vents still spewing sulfuric gasses and molten rock into the air. This was a realm of both birth and death—a land formed by raw, unbridled power and shaped by elemental chaos.

The newly formed land of Igir was initially hostile to life. Its surface was a scorched, barren expanse where rain, when it fell, turned to acidic steam upon contact with the molten rock. Geysers erupted violently, sending boiling water skyward, while rivers of lava carved their way

through the landscape, occasionally merging into massive calderas that dotted the terrain. The land was rich with minerals, but it was devoid of soil, vegetation, or shelter. It was a realm of fiery creation, marked by the primal forces of earth and heat.

Yet, amidst the chaos, life began to find a foothold. The first to adapt were the Khamadmi, a species that evolved uniquely to this volatile environment. Originally aquatic creatures, the Khamadmi were driven from the seas by the upheaval. With tough, scaled skin and bipedal mobility, they were capable of withstanding extreme temperatures and traversing the rugged volcanic terrain. Their sharp, barbed teeth and powerful jaws enabled them to prey on both sea creatures washed ashore by violent tides and any early life that dared to emerge from the cooling ash fields.

The Khamadmi became the dominant predators of this nascent land, embodying its brutality and resilience. They not only survived but thrived, claiming territories along the rocky coastlines and venturing further inland as the land gradually cooled. The Khamadmi's territorial behavior made them formidable guardians of the newly formed continent, turning Igir into a natural fortress of fiery peril.

By the end of the 300-year formation period, volcanic activity began to subside, and the land showed the earliest signs of stabilization. Volcanic rock, rich in minerals, slowly started to weather under the combined forces of wind and the first gentle rains, creating the initial layers of nutrient-rich soil. Early life forms were limited to hardy lichens and mosses that clung to crevices where moisture collected, signaling the beginning of Igir's slow transformation from a desolate wasteland to a land capable of sustaining more complex life.

While the Khamadmi were the first to adapt, the coming centuries would see the emergence of new forms of life—creatures evolving slowly within the mineral-rich soils left behind by the volcanic eruptions. These conditions, though still harsh, laid the groundwork for future ecosystems that would later support the rise of human civilization.

The Cataclysmic Birth set the tone for Igir's early history: a land forged in fire and defined by survival, a world where only the most adaptable could endure. The Būtrani were the first to locate this newly formed land, and it was into this landscape that the Būtrani exiled thousands to a land still in the process of becoming, a stage set by nature's rawest elements for the unfolding drama of human struggle, adaptation, and eventual unity. The continent's volcanic birth was not merely the beginning of a landmass but the start of a grueling and transformative era that would shape its history for millennia to come.

Exile Exodus (0 - 150 ED)

Primal Instinct

The Būtrani, a distant civilization known for their strict social structures and relentless pursuit of order, had long faced a growing problem. Their cities were overcrowded, and their streets teemed with the homeless, the destitute, and the condemned. Driven by both pragmatism and cruelty, the Būtrani devised a harsh solution. In 0 ED (Era of Desolation), they launched an expedition of voyagers to the newly discovered land of Igir—a volatile, barely habitable continent born of violent eruptions and still wreathed in steam and ash. The voyagers deemed the land unfit for Būtrani colonization due to its wild nature, but the leaders back home saw it as an ideal place to dispose of unwanted souls.

The exiles were a diverse group: criminals, political dissidents, and those deemed expendable by the social elite. A fleet of ships carried the first 3,000 exiles, each individual bearing a mark of shame burned into their flesh—a stark reminder of their banishment. As the fleet approached the shores of Igir, the landscape came into view: a rugged, smoke-hazed land with jagged peaks and vast expanses of black volcanic rock. The Būtrani had provided minimal provisions, assuming that most would perish within a matter of years. This was not a relocation—it was a death sentence.

Upon disembarkation, chaos reigned. The exiles, already weakened from the arduous journey and demoralized by their forced removal from Būtrani society, scrambled for the meager supplies left on the beaches. Fights broke out almost immediately, as food and tools became the first tokens of power in this harsh new world. Groups formed quickly, based on previous affiliations, tribal instincts, or mere convenience. Some sought to explore the interior of the continent in search of resources, while others stayed by the shore, hoping for a miracle that would not come.

The initial survival rate was grim. Many succumbed to the inhospitable environment within weeks, either by starvation, exposure, or the predation of Khamadmi. By the time the second wave of exiles arrived six years later, the landing zone was strewn with half-buried remains—some decomposing naturally, others stripped to the bone by scavenging Khamadmi. The new arrivals were shocked by the conditions, but desperation forced them to adapt quickly.

Over the next 150 years, the Būtrani continued to send small groups of 250 exiles at regular intervals. They had no contact with the exiles and no interest in their fate. By the time the last transport arrived in 150 ED, the exile population had dwindled to around 1,200 survivors. Though they remained divided into small groups, they had begun to develop rudimentary survival strategies. They scavenged what little they could find, from sharp stones to durable driftwood, and began to craft basic tools and weapons. Stone knives, spears tipped with obsidian, and simple slings made from braided plant fibers became essential tools in their fight for survival.

The exiles discovered that survival required more than brute strength; it required resourcefulness. Those who ventured inland found caves to shelter them from the fierce elements, while others built raised huts from fallen trees, using vines as ropes. In extreme cases, desperate survivors even resorted to weaving ladders from the hair of the dead to construct elevated defenses against the Khamadmi. These creatures, still the dominant predators of the continent, forced the exiles to adopt increasingly creative strategies for defense, such as luring the Khamadmi into pit traps lined with sharp stones.

Despite the hostile conditions, a basic understanding of the land began to emerge. Early foragers identified small patches of hardy vegetation, some of which proved edible, while others were used for medicinal purposes. The discovery of a tough, starchy root named *Doya* provided a modest but reliable food source, offering a measure of stability to those who cultivated it. The exiles' growing familiarity with the terrain and its resources marked the earliest steps toward adaptation, albeit driven by the desperation of survival.

However, the harshness of the environment continued to shape the exiles' relationships with one another. The scarcity of resources led to violent conflicts between groups, each vying for control of vital supplies. Cannibalism, a dark reality born of absolute need, became more prevalent as the exiles faced prolonged famine. Only the strongest or most cunning managed to survive, giving rise to a new kind of leadership—one based not on rank or birthright, but on the ability to ensure the survival of the group.

By the end of the *Exile Exodus*, the people of Igir were no longer simply Būtrani outcasts; they had become something different altogether. Shaped by the land's cruelty and forced to adapt to the ever-present dangers, they had developed a sense of fierce resilience. Though scattered and divided, their struggle had planted the seeds of a uniquely Igiri identity—one defined by an unyielding will to endure, despite the grim odds.

With the completion of the final transport in 150 ED, the Būtrani's involvement with Igir came to an end. Yet, the story of the exiles was just beginning, as they faced an uncertain future in a land where the greatest battles were still to come—both against the continent's predators and among themselves.

The Feast of Shadows (150 - 153 ED)

Madness by Desperation

The final Būtrani transport in 150 ED marked a significant turning point for the exiles of Igir. With no further arrivals, the people were forced to accept their fate—this desolate land was their only reality. Despite their attempts at adaptation, resources remained painfully scarce, and food supplies continued to dwindle. This scarcity intensified hostilities among the exiles, and the fragile social structures that had begun to form started to crumble. It was a time of unparalleled desperation, and it would soon culminate in the most brutal chapter of early Igiri history: the *Feast of Shadows*.

By this time, roughly 600 exiles remained, divided into small, desperate groups across the southeastern coasts and inland regions of Igir. Relations between these groups were tenuous at best, with occasional truces broken as swiftly as they were made. Trust was scarce, as rumors of betrayal, theft, and even cannibalism circulated widely. Survival became a zero-sum game—one could only gain by the losses of another. The first signs of the coming slaughter were subtle but deadly. Disappearances, once rare, became common, and small skirmishes quickly escalated into all-out conflict.

The *Feast of Shadows* began in late 151 ED, sparked by a raid on a small group's food reserves near the coastal cliffs. This attack was not an isolated incident; it was the prelude to a chain of retaliatory strikes that soon engulfed the entire southeastern region. Fueled by rage and desperation, the groups became locked in a relentless cycle of violence. Alliances, forged for convenience, broke apart as soon as the promise of more food or resources became apparent elsewhere. The exiles were no longer merely struggling to survive—they had turned on each other, consumed by a primal need to dominate, even at the cost of their humanity.

Over the course of nearly three months, the killings reached a new level of savagery. It was not just a matter of taking what was needed but also of eliminating potential threats to future survival. Each group, now operating under an unspoken doctrine of total war, sought to annihilate competitors entirely. This meant not only raiding food stores but also slaughtering every man, woman, and child to prevent revenge or reprisal. The brutality was so extreme that some groups began to leave traps laden with poisoned meat or spiked pits, aiming to cripple or kill potential raiders before direct conflict could even occur.

Cannibalism, which had previously been a grim last resort, became a calculated strategy. Many exiles viewed it as not just a means of survival but a psychological weapon, using it to instill fear and break the spirits of weaker groups. The Khamadmi, ever opportunistic predators, also took advantage of the chaos. Drawn by the scent of blood and the sounds of battle, they attacked the combatants indiscriminately, often tearing through both sides of a conflict before retreating into the shadows.

By the beginning of 152 ED, less than 400 exiles remained. The survivors were hardened, driven by the basest instincts. Those still alive were skilled in evasion and combat, having learned to navigate the rocky terrain and use the volcanic landscape to their advantage. The deepening hunger, coupled with the relentless violence, began to wear down even the most resilient among them. Many succumbed to starvation or the elements, their bodies left as grim markers on a land already littered with death.

Amidst the horror, a few individuals retained a faint glimmer of humanity. These rare figures, often skilled healers or herbalists, attempted to mediate conflicts or tend to the wounded. However, their efforts were largely in vain, as trust was a forgotten concept. One notable healer, an exile named Yela, managed to convince a small group to spare another group's children during a raid, marking one of the few merciful acts of the era. Yela's story, though a rare exception, would later become a symbol of endurance, representing a fragile hope that humanity was not entirely lost in the darkness.

The turning point of the *Feast of Shadows* came in mid-152 ED, when the larger groups, now reduced to mere fragments of their former numbers, could no longer sustain constant warfare. Resources were so depleted that further conflict became almost impossible. Instead

of fighting, the exiles began to scavenge the dead—both human and Khamadmi—for anything useful. Bone tools, sinew ropes, and makeshift weapons became essential for the remaining survivors, who no longer had the energy or numbers to launch full-scale attacks. The landscape became eerily quiet, as those still alive focused solely on subsistence, abandoning the thought of conquest.

The *Feast of Shadows* came to an end not through peace but through sheer attrition. By mid-153 ED, only around 200 survivors remained, scattered and divided across the landscape. Weakened and broken, they were little more than remnants of a once-larger group of exiles. It was a period defined by absolute despair, where the pursuit of survival had reached its lowest, most desperate depths. With the end of the *Feast of Shadows*, the survivors faced an uncertain future in a land where the greatest battles were still to come—not just against Igir’s harsh landscape and fierce predators, but within the hearts of the people themselves.

The *Feast of Shadows* marked the lowest point of human existence on Igir. It was an era defined by absolute desperation, where the concepts of trust and unity were discarded in favor of raw survival. However, it also set the stage for change. The survivors, scarred by the horrors they had witnessed and perpetrated, carried with them the hard-earned understanding that no one could thrive alone in such a hostile land. It was this realization, born of darkness and death, that would eventually lead to the tentative beginnings of diplomacy and the first steps toward a more unified existence in Igir.

The Khamadmi Extermination Campaign (153 - 200ED)

Military Action

As the survivors of the *Feast of Shadows* struggled to recover from years of relentless conflict, they found themselves facing a different but equally pressing threat: the Khamadmi. These predators, once opportunistic scavengers of human conflicts, had reclaimed their dominance over the land, emboldened by the reduced human population. The survivors, now numbering fewer than 200, realized that survival was impossible without addressing the ever-present danger of these creatures.

The seven remaining tribes—Dyenra, Udrade, Kokhran, Klenka, Dłush[§], Radye, and Myoras—emerged as the core of the scattered survivors. Each had developed a keen awareness of the Khamadmi's behaviors and weaknesses through years of harrowing encounters. Though the tribes remained wary of one another, they understood that a coordinated effort was essential to reduce the Khamadmi threat. For the first time since their arrival on Igir, there was a shared goal that transcended tribal divisions, however fragile that unity might have been.

The Khamadmi were formidable predators, with their barbed teeth and powerful, agile bodies adapted perfectly to Igir's rugged landscape. They moved with surprising speed on two legs but struggled greatly when forced onto their stomachs or backs. This weakness, noted by several tribes during earlier battles, became the focus of a new strategy: to trap and exterminate as many Khamadmi as possible in order to reclaim vital territories for human use.

Around 160ED, the tribes discovered a crucial resource for their campaign—*Konueno Mesha*, a type of rope made from the vines of a hardy plant coated with a potent oil derived from the Konueno fish. These fish, inhabiting the shallow coastal waters, were highly toxic when consumed, but their oil, once extracted, had unique properties that made the Mesha both flexible and extremely durable. The exiles had learned of the fish's toxic nature through tragic trial and error, but this discovery turned a dangerous liability into a key asset.

Using the *Konueno Mesha*, the tribes devised a plan to trap the Khamadmi en masse. They created large boulder nets by tying stones together with the Mesha and lining narrow ravines, which they dubbed "Mi'khamadmi Remoshe," or "Predator's Throat." These ravines were strategically chosen based on the Khamadmi's known hunting patterns, making them ideal sites for ambush. The tribes would lure the Khamadmi into these pathways with bait—often captured game or even the bodies of fallen exiles—before releasing the boulders from the cliffs above. The traps were designed to incapacitate or kill the Khamadmi swiftly, preventing them from escaping or counterattacking.

The initial attempts were risky and met with mixed results. Some Khamadmi managed to escape the traps, causing casualties among the hunters. However, the tribes persisted, refining their techniques and learning from each failure. Over time, the campaign began to yield significant success. The Khamadmi, once fearsome and seemingly unstoppable, began to diminish in number, and their presence in the southeastern regions weakened. By 175ED, the seven tribes had established themselves as the dominant force in the region, reclaiming vital hunting grounds and establishing safer territories for their people.

The Khamadmi Extermination Campaign marked a critical turning point in the *Era of Desolation*. The tribes were no longer simply reacting to threats; they had begun to shape their environment actively. This shift in mindset signified more than just a temporary alliance—it was the beginning of strategic thinking and collective planning that would later become central to the development of civilization on Igir. It was a triumph of ingenuity over instinct, as the tribes recognized that collaboration, even amidst lingering distrust, could yield greater rewards than constant conflict.

By 200ED, the Khamadmi population had been reduced to the point where they no longer posed an existential threat to human survival. While still present, the creatures were confined to more remote areas, no longer capable of large-scale attacks on human settlements. The surviving tribes, now more stable and confident, began to expand their influence, exploring further inland and seeking new resources to sustain their growing numbers. The campaign had not only secured the exiles' immediate survival but also set a precedent for cooperative endeavors that would shape the emerging society of Igir.

The *Khamadmi Extermination Campaign* was a significant chapter in the history of the *Era of Desolation*. It demonstrated the potential of unity forged in necessity, a lesson that would be echoed in the coming centuries as the tribes continued to struggle, adapt, and evolve toward a more stable existence. Though the concept of enduring unity was still distant, the campaign laid the groundwork for the strategic and collaborative efforts that would eventually lead to the *Age of Unity*.

The Discovery of New Wildlife (200 - 220ED)

The Curiosities of Youth

With the Khamadmi threat significantly reduced by 200ED, the survivors of Igir found themselves in a rare moment of respite. While the land remained harsh and resources still scarce, the absence of constant predation allowed the tribes to focus more on exploration and resource gathering. The need for survival had shifted from immediate conflict to a longer-term quest for sustainable living. It was during this pivotal period that two neighboring tribes, the Khomi and Dinyu, inadvertently set the stage for one of the most significant discoveries in early Igiri history.

Despite a general rule against mingling with other tribes, two young members—Sruł of the Khomi and Yinesh of the Dinyu—met unexpectedly while foraging near the borderlands between their territories. Both tribes had established camps close to a central forest, but neither had ventured far beyond due to lingering fears of the Khamadmi and the unfamiliar terrain. However, curiosity and the desire for more resources drove the two teenagers beyond the established safe zones.

In the early morning of 201ED, Sruł and Yinesh, fueled by a mix of youthful bravery and recklessness, agreed to explore the uncharted land further inland. They ventured toward the thin, spiky mountains visible from their camps, a region previously avoided by both tribes due

to the dense foliage and rough terrain. As they navigated through this unfamiliar landscape, they were surprised to find a peculiar abundance of plant life and a marked decrease in Khamadmi presence. The air grew cooler, and the soil underfoot was softer, suggesting a more fertile environment.

Their journey took them to a cluster of five small lakes nestled among the foothills of the mountains. The lakes were surrounded by lush vegetation, including several new species of flowering plants. In this secluded region, Sruř and Yinesh made a groundbreaking discovery—three previously unknown species of mammals, each uniquely adapted to the emerging ecosystem of Igir.

The first species they encountered was the **Yassa**, a medium-sized marsupial-rodent hybrid. The Yassa had a thick, bushy tail and sharp, chisel-like teeth, perfect for gnawing on tough roots and tree bark. It was timid but curious, and its soft fur provided a potential source of warmth for the tribes, should they manage to capture and domesticate it.

The second discovery was the **Krom**, a peculiar quadruped with a long, thin neck and winding, bramble-like horns. These horns were not just for defense but also served an extraordinary ecological purpose—they carried seeds from the plants the Krom grazed upon. Some Krom had vines trailing from their horns, while others bore patches of moss or even blooming flowers. This symbiosis between animal and plant made the Krom a critical factor in the region's expanding biodiversity. Sruř and Yinesh were captivated by this unusual creature, which seemed to embody the potential for harmonious coexistence between the evolving flora and fauna of Igir.

The third and most formidable discovery was the **Ařanikh**, a massive arthropod with long, segmented legs, powerful claws, and a thick exoskeleton. The Ařanikh was primarily a scavenger but could also be an aggressive predator when provoked. Its size and strength suggested that it played a major role in keeping the Khamadmi away from the region, as its powerful claws could easily puncture the softer underbelly of a Khamadmi. Sruř and Yinesh approached the Ařanikh with caution, observing it from a safe distance before retreating to share their findings with their respective tribes.

Upon their return, Sru and Yinesh reported their discoveries to the elders of the Khomi and Dinyu tribes. Initially skeptical, the elders were eventually convinced by the detailed accounts and the samples of unusual plants the teenagers had brought back. The Khomi and Dinyu elders, wary of repeating the mistakes made during the *Feast of Shadows*, agreed that this newfound abundance of resources must be handled carefully. They feared that the other tribes might overexploit the wildlife, leading to further conflict and instability.

By 205ED, both tribes had begun a slow, deliberate movement toward the lakes. The Khomi settled in the northeastern forests, while the Dinyu occupied the southwestern fields. The migration was carefully managed to avoid direct confrontations, but it brought the two tribes into closer proximity than ever before. This proximity heightened the need for clear communication and mutual understanding, as the region's delicate ecosystem could not support large-scale exploitation.

As they settled into the new territory, Sru and Yinesh continued to foster their bond, meeting secretly to discuss strategies for peaceful coexistence between their tribes. Their efforts were not solely for personal benefit; both understood that the long-term survival of their people depended on cooperation. However, they also recognized the risks of openly advocating for such cooperation, fearing backlash from tribal members still wary of other groups.

The next significant development came in 210ED, when the first signs of potential conflict emerged over shared resources. Small disputes broke out over hunting rights and water access, threatening to unravel the tentative peace. Sensing the potential for larger conflicts, Sru and Yinesh took bold steps. They persuaded their elders to meet in neutral territory, hoping to negotiate agreements on resource distribution. This decision set the stage for the first formal diplomatic meeting in Igiri history.

By 220ED, the Khomi and Dinyu tribes had not only managed to maintain a fragile peace but had also established a foundation for a more structured form of diplomacy. Their mutual dependence on the new ecosystem fostered a sense of shared responsibility. This budding cooperation was not just a matter of survival; it marked the early stirrings of a more unified approach to life on Igir.

The First Diplomacy (220 - 235ED)

Mutual Interest

The cautious migrations of the Khomi and Dinyu tribes into the newly discovered central region of Igir had brought them into unprecedented proximity. Though the initial settlement was peaceful, the shared resources of the lakes and surrounding forests became points of tension as both tribes sought to establish their presence. By 220ED, small disputes over hunting grounds, fishing rights, and access to freshwater began to flare up, threatening to disrupt the fragile coexistence the tribes had managed to achieve.

Sensing the potential for a larger conflict, the elders of both tribes recognized the need for direct negotiation. This was a radical departure from the established norms of the *Era of Desolation*, where tribal interactions had been defined by either isolation or violent competition. The initiative for this unprecedented meeting was driven in part by Sruł and Yinesh, whose secret bond had continued to flourish amidst the broader tensions. Both had risen to greater prominence within their respective tribes, advocating for a cooperative approach to resource management.

In early 222ED, the elders of the Khomi and Dinyu agreed to convene in a neutral zone—a small clearing on the southern shore of the largest lake. The gathering was tense, with each tribe bringing a handful of guards to ensure safety. The air was thick with mistrust, as memories of past betrayals and the brutal struggles of the *Feast of Shadows* lingered in the minds of those present. Yet, the urgency of the situation outweighed old grievances, as both tribes understood that continued discord could lead to mutual destruction.

The negotiations were led by Elder Vashka of the Khomi and Elder Nyoli of the Dinyu. Vashka, a pragmatic leader with a deep understanding of his people's needs, sought a fair distribution of resources that would benefit both tribes without giving too much ground. Nyoli, meanwhile, emphasized the need for a clear agreement on territorial boundaries and seasonal access to the lakes. The talks were slow, punctuated by long silences and the

occasional flare-up of tempers. However, the presence of Sruř and Yinesh, who served as informal mediators, helped to keep the discussions focused.

The breakthrough came on the third day of negotiations, when Vashka proposed a system of alternating access to key resources. This arrangement would allow both tribes to fish and hunt in different zones depending on the season, preventing overexploitation and reducing the likelihood of direct competition. Nyohi agreed, suggesting a further measure: the establishment of a shared storage area for surplus food, where both tribes could contribute and draw from in times of scarcity. This proposal was a significant step forward, as it demonstrated a willingness to invest in the long-term stability of the region.

By the end of 222ED, the Khomi and Dinyu tribes had signed the first known diplomatic agreement in Igiri history. It was a simple document, carved into a large flat stone that was placed near the lakeshore as a symbol of the newfound cooperation. The agreement included clear terms for resource sharing, territorial boundaries, and dispute resolution. While not a formal alliance, it marked the beginning of a more structured relationship between tribes, one that went beyond mere survival.

The impact of this diplomatic breakthrough was immediate and significant. Relations between the Khomi and Dinyu improved, and minor disputes were resolved through the agreed-upon mechanisms rather than through violence. Children from both tribes began to play together near the lakes, and informal exchanges of goods—such as furs, feathers, and precious stones—became more common. The shared storage area proved useful during a minor drought in 224ED, reinforcing the value of mutual aid.

However, the success of this diplomatic effort was not without its challenges. Members of both tribes remained skeptical, wary that the agreement might be a ploy for eventual domination. Tensions occasionally flared, particularly when hunting parties from one tribe ventured too close to the other's designated territory. It was during one of these incidents in 226ED that Sruř and Yinesh, now respected figures in their tribes, intervened to prevent an outbreak of violence. Their actions further solidified their roles as key advocates for peace, and their bond became a symbol of the potential for unity amidst the enduring mistrust.

By 230ED, the Khomi and Dinyu tribes had not only managed to maintain their diplomatic agreement but had also begun to explore new forms of cooperation. Joint hunts for the Yassa became more common, as did collaborative efforts to domesticate the animal. The tribes also exchanged knowledge about medicinal plants and crafting techniques, slowly weaving a more integrated cultural fabric. This process was not always smooth—cultural differences often led to misunderstandings—but it was marked by a growing sense of mutual respect.

The *First Diplomacy* laid the foundation for more structured intertribal relations in Igir. It demonstrated that cooperation, though fragile, was not only possible but also beneficial in the harsh landscape of the *Era of Desolation*. As the Khomi and Dinyu elders passed on the knowledge and terms of their agreement to younger generations, the seeds of unity were further sown, preparing the way for more ambitious attempts at unification in the future.

Unbreakable Bonds (235 - 265ED)

A Rare Meeting

With the *First Diplomacy* firmly established by 235ED, the Khomi and Dinyu tribes entered a new phase of relations, marked by collaboration and mutual benefit. The agreement forged between Elder Vashka of the Khomi and Elder Nyoli of the Dinyu had not only ensured resource sharing but had also sparked an unexpected cultural exchange. The children, who played together near the lakes, became a bridge between tribes, learning each other's languages, customs, and games. Women from both tribes began to share cooking methods and medicinal knowledge, while hunters and artisans exchanged techniques for trapping, crafting, and survival.

Among the key figures of this era were Sruř and Yinesh, the two young men whose bond had been central to initiating the tribes' cooperation. Now in their early thirties, both had risen to the ranks of their respective village councils—Sruř as a prominent hunter among the Khomi, and Yinesh as the trade manager for the Dinyu. Their influence played a crucial role in

maintaining the peace and pushing for further integration. Their bond, once secretive and cautious, became a public symbol of the strength that could arise from unity.

The years following the initial diplomacy were not without challenges. In 238ED, a severe storm struck the region, flooding the lowlands and damaging the shared storage area near the lakes. The flooding caused significant losses to both tribes' food reserves, threatening the fragile peace. However, instead of reverting to competition, the tribes came together in a remarkable display of solidarity. Elders Vashka and Nyoti coordinated a joint effort to rebuild the storage area on higher ground, ensuring that future floods would not pose the same risk. This collaborative response not only mitigated the immediate crisis but also reinforced the tribes' commitment to their agreement.

As the years passed, the integration between the Khomi and Dinyu deepened. In 245ED, the tribes initiated their first formal joint venture: a large hunt for the Krom, whose unique plant-bearing horns were increasingly recognized as valuable for the region's reforestation efforts. The Krom hunt, led by Sruř and Yinesh, was a landmark event. It demonstrated the tribes' ability to plan, organize, and execute a complex operation together. The successful hunt yielded not only meat and furs but also new opportunities for domestication, as several young Krom were captured alive for potential breeding.

In 252ED, a defining moment occurred that would later be known as the *Bonding Feast*. During a routine trading caravan exchange between the tribes, a large Ařanikh suddenly emerged from the surrounding brush, charging directly toward Yinesh. The Dinyu elder, caught off guard, was almost certain to be crushed under the creature's massive claws. In a moment of decisive bravery, Sruř grabbed his long-spear, thrusting it into the Ařanikh's throat and pinning its head to the ground. The forward motion of the creature forced it onto its hind legs, where Sruř's guards rushed in to aid in its final defeat.

This act of bravery not only saved Yinesh's life but also cemented the trust between the two tribes. In the aftermath, the tribes held a grand feast to honor Sruř's courage, but also to acknowledge the Ařanikh as a symbol of the land's harsh but sacred balance. The feast was marked by a solemn recognition of the challenges both tribes faced together, as well as a celebration of their growing unity. It was the first event where the Khomi and Dinyu tribes

openly referred to one another as “brothers of the lakes,” signifying a deeper bond that transcended mere diplomacy.

Over the next decade, the integration of the tribes continued at a steady pace. By 260ED, it was common to see mixed groups of Khomi and Dinyu working together in hunting parties, trade caravans, and even in the shared construction of new shelters. This level of cooperation, almost unthinkable just a few generations prior, became a defining feature of life around the central lakes. The children born during this era, many of whom had friendships spanning both tribes, embodied a new cultural identity that blended Khomi and Dinyu traditions.

The unthinkable, however, eventually arrived. In 263ED, Sruṭ, the Khomi elder and symbol of intertribal unity, succumbed to an illness that had swept through his tribe. His death was deeply felt not only by the Khomi but also by the Dinyu, who had come to see him as an ally and friend. A large funeral was held near the lakes, attended by members of both tribes. Yinesh, devastated by the loss of his lifelong friend, spoke at the funeral, praising Sruṭ not just as a brave warrior, but as a man who had truly believed in the power of unity.

The death of Sruṭ could have marked a setback for relations between the tribes. However, his legacy was carried forward by his successor, Myesh, a hunter who had been a key figure in maintaining intertribal relations. Myesh, known for his dedication to preserving peace, vowed to uphold the spirit of cooperation that Sruṭ had championed. He worked closely with Yinesh, who continued to serve as the trade manager for the Dinyu, to ensure that the bond between the two tribes remained strong.

In 265ED, Yinesh, too, passed away—this time of old age. His funeral, like Sruṭ's, was a joint affair, attended by both tribes. The Dinyu held a grand feast in his honor, celebrating his life, achievements, and commitment to the unity of the tribes. His successor, Laksho, was equally committed to maintaining the peace. With both tribes now fully invested in the long-term success of their cooperation, the bonds forged over the past three decades had become unbreakable.

The *Unbreakable Bonds* era marked a transformative period in the *Era of Desolation*. It was a testament to the potential for lasting peace, even in a land shaped by brutality and hardship.

The relationship between the Khomi and Dinyu would serve as a model for other tribes in the coming centuries, demonstrating that unity could be not just a means of survival but a source of strength and prosperity. As the *Era of Desolation* continued, the foundation for broader alliances and the eventual *Age of Unity* was being built, one bond at a time.

The Flintforge Revolution (265 - 285ED)

A Useful Stone

By 265ED, the unity established between the Khomi and Dinyu tribes had demonstrated the benefits of cooperation amidst Igir's harsh landscape. While their bond was a symbol of hope, the broader region still struggled with division and isolation. At this time, Igir was home to eleven surviving tribes: Dyenra, Dinyu, Udrade, Kokhran, Khomi, Khasaldi, Klenka, Dlush, Radye, Myoras, and the Shidyona. Each tribe operated independently, constantly vying for territory and resources while navigating the continent's unforgiving environment.

The Shidyona, known for their resilience, inhabited the rocky and barren Arid Mountains in the east. Their tools were primarily crafted from volcanic rock, which was sharp but brittle, limiting their effectiveness. However, in 267ED, Shidyona foragers made a significant discovery that would transform the technological landscape of Igir: *flint*. While searching for sources of fresh water at the base of a crumbling cliff, they stumbled upon veins of this hard, sharp-edged stone embedded within the rocky terrain.

Flint was unlike any material the Shidyona had worked with before. When struck against harder rock, it produced sparks that made fire-starting easier, a major boon for a tribe accustomed to harsh, cold nights. More importantly, flint's durability and versatility enabled the crafting of stronger, sharper tools and weapons. The Shidyona, known for their ingenuity, quickly adapted their tool-making techniques to include flint, producing sharper knives,

spearheads, and scrapers. These new tools allowed for more efficient hunting and resource gathering, providing the Shidyona with a critical advantage in the region.

News of the Shidyona's discovery spread quickly among the other tribes. Flint was an immediate game-changer—its superior cutting edge could be used for both hunting and survival tasks. The Shidyona began trading flint tools with nearby tribes, including the Kokhran and Myoras, who were among the first to recognize its value. The Kokhran, situated in the foothills of central Igir, found flint especially useful for hunting Krom and other large prey, while the Myoras, skilled crafters, experimented with flint-tipped arrows and improved woodworking techniques.

The emergence of flint technology sparked what would later be called the *Flintforge Revolution*, a period of rapid innovation and adaptation across Igir. Flint knives replaced volcanic rock blades, allowing for cleaner cuts and faster processing of game. Flint-tipped spears, harder and more effective, became the standard for hunting and defense. Tribes that had struggled with inconsistent tool quality now experienced greater success in hunting and resource gathering. The Dłush and Radye, known for their wide-ranging exploration, began to actively seek flint deposits within their own territories, driving a wave of exploration across the continent.

As flint became more widely available, trade networks expanded, fostering increased interaction among the eight tribes. While mistrust and rivalry persisted, the benefits of trading flint tools and knowledge outweighed the risks of isolation. Exchanges often took place at neutral sites, with tribes trading not only flint but also furs, medicinal herbs, and other resources. This growing web of trade signified the early stages of economic interdependence—a critical step toward broader cooperation.

However, the rapid spread of flint technology also led to conflicts over control of flint deposits. In 273ED, tensions flared between the Kłenka and Dłush^y tribes over a newly discovered flint vein along their border. Several skirmishes broke out as both tribes sought exclusive access to the resource. These clashes highlighted the persistent competition for power and resources, even as the tribes recognized the potential benefits of shared access to flint.

Despite these challenges, the *Flintforge Revolution* fundamentally shifted the way tribes interacted with their environment and each other. The Udrade, who lived near dense forests, began using flint tools to clear small areas of land for limited attempts at agriculture. Early farming efforts focused on cultivating *Doya*, a hardy root vegetable that had become a staple food source. With more reliable tools, the Udrade's success in producing a steady food supply prompted other tribes to explore similar agricultural practices, albeit on a small scale.

By 280ED, flint tools had become widespread among all eight tribes, drastically improving survival rates and resource management. While flint technology did not erase the deep-seated divisions among tribes, it did foster a greater sense of intertribal awareness and dialogue. The shared need for flint encouraged tribes to negotiate resource-sharing agreements, which, though fragile, represented a step forward in the development of diplomacy on Igir.

The Shidyona, whose discovery had sparked this transformation, gained considerable influence during this period. They became respected as both traders and innovators, frequently sought out for advice on flint tool crafting. This newfound prestige strengthened the tribe's position, elevating them from relative obscurity to a central player in the evolving dynamics of Igir.

The *Flintforge Revolution* was a defining moment in the *Era of Desolation*. It demonstrated humanity's capacity to innovate and adapt, even in the harshest conditions. Flint, a simple but vital resource, became a symbol of resilience and ingenuity, bridging the gap between survival and the early stages of civilization. While unity remained a distant ideal, the lessons learned during this era—cooperation, resource management, and the sharing of knowledge—laid a crucial foundation for the eventual *Age of Unity*.

The Birth of Civilization (285 - 300ED)

Flourishment of Alliance

By 285ED, the *Flintforge Revolution* had reached all 11 tribes of Igir—Dyenra, Udrade, Kokhran, Klenka, Dhush, Radye, Myoras, Shidyona, Dinyu, Khomi, and Khasaldi. Flint tools had drastically improved hunting, resource management, and early attempts at agriculture, fostering cautious trade and diplomacy. Yet the continent remained divided by old rivalries and competition for resources, with tribes often clashing over territory. It was within this fragmented landscape that a visionary leader from the Kokhran tribe, named Niroklo, began to reshape the fate of Igir.

Niroklo was raised in the Kokhran tribe, located at the heart of Igir's central region. The Kokhran were strategically positioned in the lush valley near the central mountains, which offered both natural defenses and access to vital resources like water, game, and flint. Niroklo grew up amidst tales of the *Feast of Shadows* and the struggles of earlier generations, but he was not content with mere survival. He believed in the potential for a unified Igiri civilization, one built on cooperation rather than constant conflict.

In 287ED, a sudden Khamadmi onslaught struck the Kokhran's territory from the western mountain slopes. These beasts descended in overwhelming numbers, taking advantage of the mountainous cover. Niroklo, wielding his *Khudryin*—a polearm with a sword-like blade—led the defense, managing to repel some of the attackers while directing the retreat of Kokhran survivors. The attack left the Kokhran weakened and exposed, and Niroklo knew that the Kokhran could not withstand the Khamadmi alone.

Determined to form alliances, Niroklo set out to contact the Dhush tribe to the southeast, situated near the same mountain range but farther down along the rugged slopes. The Dhush^y had always been wary of outsiders, their camp nestled amid rocky outcroppings that provided natural barriers. Niroklo, accompanied by two Kokhran warriors, made the arduous journey south through steep trails and dense forests, finally reaching the Dhush^y settlement. They were met with suspicion, as the Dhush guards raised their spears in defense.

Niroklo requested a meeting with the Dhush elder, Torvin, emphasizing the urgency of his mission. "We can no longer survive alone," he urged. "The Khamadmi grow stronger, and we must unite to stand against them. We have refuge in the central mountains; join us, and let us defend our people together." Torvin, a seasoned leader with a deep understanding of the

region's dangers, agreed to accompany Niroklo back to the Kokhran territory to see the situation firsthand.

The return journey was fraught with danger. As they neared the midpoint between the Kokhran and Dłush camps, two Khamadmi ambushed the group. Torvin's guards were caught off guard, and Torvin himself was gravely wounded. Niroklo, with his *Khudryin*, managed to fend off the Khamadmi, delivering swift, precise strikes that brought both creatures down. His bravery and skill left a strong impression on Torvin and the remaining Dłush warriors, solidifying their trust.

Upon returning to the Kokhran settlement, Torvin, now convinced of the need for an alliance, pledged the support of the Dłush tribe. Word of Niroklo's bold actions spread quickly, and emissaries were sent to nearby tribes, including the Udrade and Myoras, who occupied territories east of the Kokhran. The Udrade were based in the fertile plains beyond the mountains, while the Myoras inhabited dense forests along the lower foothills. Both tribes, known for their pragmatic leadership, saw the benefits of a united front against the Khamadmi and other threats, and they agreed to join Niroklo's alliance.

However, not all tribes were as open to the idea of unity. The Kłenka, situated in the northernmost peaks of the central mountain range, were fiercely territorial and suspicious of other tribes' intentions. When emissaries reached their camp, they were met with hostility. Dekkor, the Kłenka elder, was dismissive of Niroklo's vision, seeing it as an encroachment on Kłenka autonomy. "Do they know you've come to us?" Dekkor asked with a smirk. The emissaries replied honestly, "No, we seek others to follow Niroklo's vision." Dekkor, angered by the potential loss of influence, signaled his guards to eliminate the emissaries. "Ready the Khamadmi tamers," he ordered coldly. "We will crush this so-called unity before it reaches our peaks."

Meanwhile, Niroklo's coalition continued to strengthen. By 290ED, it included four tribes: Kokhran, Dłush, Udrade, and Myoras. The coalition remained fragile, bound more by the necessity of mutual defense than by a shared ideology. Niroklo understood that to sustain this alliance, he needed a unifying set of principles that transcended mere survival. In 295ED, he introduced the idea of the *Moral Tablet*, a set of guiding virtues intended to foster trust,

fairness, and collective well-being. These values were not only practical but also spiritual, inspired by Ijalla, the Mother of Existence.

The introduction of the *Moral Tablet* was met with mixed reactions. Some tribes embraced the virtues as a means to build a more cohesive society, while others remained skeptical, viewing them as idealistic in a still-hostile world. Nevertheless, the tablet marked the first formal attempt to establish a shared moral foundation, reflecting Niroklo's broader vision of a united Igir.

The *Birth of Civilization* marked the beginning of Igir's transition from fragmented survival to a more structured and cooperative society. Niroklo's coalition, though fragile and contested, laid the groundwork for what would eventually become the *Age of Unity*. As the alliance expanded and more tribes joined, the continent inched closer to a new era defined by shared values, strategic alliances, and a collective effort to overcome the harsh challenges of Igir's landscape.

The Klenka's Reckoning (300 - 310ED)

An Unprovoked Assault

By the year 300ED, Niroklo's coalition of tribes—Kokhran, Dkush, Udrade, and Myoras—had strengthened its position across central Igir. The alliance had begun to establish fortified settlements near the mountain range, with Niroklo's vision of unity further fueled by the growing acceptance of the *Moral Tablet*. However, this progress was not without resistance. The Klenka, deeply entrenched in the northern peaks of the central mountains, remained fiercely opposed to Niroklo's growing influence. They viewed the coalition as a direct threat to their autonomy and their control over critical resources in the region.

Dekkor, the Klenka elder, was determined to crush the coalition before it gained further momentum. He commanded his tribe's Khamadmi tamers to launch a decisive strike against Niroklo's stronghold in the central valleys. The Klenka's cunning over the wild Khamadmi was unparalleled; through generations of trial and error, they had developed techniques to lure and direct the creatures for strategic attacks. Dekkor's plan was to unleash a swarm of Khamadmi into the valley settlements, intending to create chaos and weaken the coalition's morale.

In early 302ED, the Klenka's attack began. Using baited traps and loud reverberating instruments designed to mimic the Khamadmi's territorial calls, they managed to drive a considerable number of the creatures into the coalition's settlements. The initial impact was devastating. The Khamadmi, powerful and frenzied, tore through the defenses, leaving Niroklo's warriors scrambling to defend their people. The assault threatened to fracture the fragile alliance, as panic spread among the tribes.

However, Niroklo quickly recognized that direct combat would only result in further casualties. He gathered his closest advisors, including Torvin of the Dłush and Yoreir of the Myoras, to devise a counter-strategy that did not rely on brute force. Niroklo proposed an audacious plan: rather than attempting to kill the Khamadmi, they would redirect the creatures back toward the Klenka's own territory. The coalition's scouts had observed that the Khamadmi, once agitated, would follow distinct territorial markers and scents—an instinct that could be manipulated.

The coalition's warriors, working swiftly under Niroklo's direction, set up a series of lures made from strong-smelling animal fats mixed with the scent of the Klenka fabrics. The bait was strategically placed along the lower slopes of the mountains, creating a trail that led directly toward the Klenka stronghold. At the same time, drums and horn blasts were used to guide the Khamadmi along this path. The tactic required precise coordination and immense courage, as warriors had to position the lures while avoiding the Khamadmi's frenzied attacks.

The strategy worked better than expected. The Khamadmi, driven by their aggressive instincts and the familiar scent of their handlers, turned away from the coalition's settlements and surged toward the northern peaks. By mid-303ED, the swarm reached the Klenka's territory,

creating chaos within their stronghold. The very creatures that had been used as weapons now became a dire threat to their masters. The Klenka, unprepared for such a reversal, found themselves overwhelmed by the Khamadmi they had sought to control.

The sudden Khamadmi invasion forced the Klenka into a difficult decision. With their defenses compromised and their resources dwindling, Dekkor realized that continuing to hold the northern peaks was no longer viable. The tribe began a hasty retreat, abandoning their mountain stronghold in favor of a safer location. By 305ED, the Klenka had resettled on the western shores of Igir, beyond the mountain range. The move was driven not by defeat in battle but by a clever tactic that turned their own strength against them.

The successful redirection of the Khamadmi was a significant victory for Niroklo's coalition, not only securing the central valleys but also demonstrating the effectiveness of strategic thinking over sheer force. It also sent a powerful message to the remaining tribes: the coalition was capable of both defense and cunning, making it a formidable entity in the increasingly complex landscape of Igir.

The Klenka's relocation marked the beginning of a new chapter for the tribe. While they had lost their position in the northern mountains, they found new opportunities on the western shore, a region rich in untapped resources. Though this move would eventually lead to the founding of a significant coastal city in the coming centuries, for now, it signified a major shift in Igiri geopolitics—one that consolidated Niroklo's coalition as the dominant force in central Igir.

The Klenka's Reckoning was more than just a tactical victory; it represented a turning point in the *Era of Desolation*. It proved that survival and growth depended not just on physical strength but on ingenuity and adaptability. Niroklo's coalition, having successfully defended its position, was now poised to continue expanding its influence, and it was at this time that the *Era of Desolation* came to an end. Niroklo proposed the beginning of a new age, aptly named the *Age of Unity (AU)*, and named his coalition *Khomaktu*, which in the Anili dialect of Butrani was defined as "Gentle People."

The establishment of *Khomaktu* marked the formal beginning of a unified effort to bring peace and stability to Igir. While the challenges of true unity remained, the tribes now had a name and a guiding principle to rally around. The first steps of the *Age of Unity* would be shaped by the coalition's efforts to integrate more tribes into its fold, solidify its governing structure, and maintain the virtues that had brought them together. The ideals of Niroklo and his coalition now stood as a beacon for the future, setting the stage for a new era of hope and collaboration.

The Rise and Fall of Virtue

Era of the Founding: 0 - 99 AU

The Dawn of Unity (0 - 46 AU)

In the dawn of recorded history, the continent of Igir was a realm of strife and disarray. Storms ravaged barren plains, dense forests concealed threats both wild and tribal, and towering mountains stood as silent, unyielding witnesses to the chaos below. Survival was often dictated by cunning rather than honor, with each tribe grasping for sustenance in a fractured land. But amidst this discord, a figure later emerged whose name would become synonymous with the birth of civilization: Niroklo.

In the year 0 AU, Niroklo, a man of both formidable stature and profound presence, stood as a beacon of hope. His piercing eyes, said to mirror the fierce winds of the mountains and the serenity of the meadows, carried the weight of a visionary, not a conqueror. Guided by an inner calling to establish a new order, he founded the kingdom of Khomaktu, meaning "Gentle People." Niroklo's rule was centered around ideals rather than force, as he sought to unite disparate tribes under a shared banner, despite the rugged and unforgiving terrain.

Assuming the title of Dakht, or "Father," Niroklo led with humility. His governance was simple, often marked by the company of commoners rather than armored guards. He communicated not with commands but with appeals to virtues long lost in the strife: compassion, wisdom, and justice. Central to his rule was the belief that power lay not in conquest but in guiding his people toward unity through virtue.

In his early years as Dakht, Niroklo wrestled with the existential questions that haunted him: What was the true nature of the world? What force governed existence? His introspection led him to a profound realization: the higher power he sought was not a singular entity but the sum of all things capable of experience. This concept of a god was vast, encompassing everything that breathed life into the world, from the towering mountains to the smallest of creatures. To commune with this force, Niroklo turned to Miechtihi, a colossal elder tree believed to be a sacred link between the physical and the ethereal. He posed the question to Miechtihi: what may he call this all-encompassing presence? In response, the ancient tree whispered a single word: Ijalla.

In its origin, Ijalla was not a being but a term that encompassed existence itself. However, as the people of Khomaktu adopted the teachings of the Moral Tablet—Niroklo's codified list of 32 Virtues—they began to interpret Ijalla not just as a concept but as a guiding presence. Over time, these interpretations evolved into a personification, ultimately laying the groundwork for the rise of Ineilla in future generations.

Niroklo's central achievement was the creation of the Moral Tablet, the 32 Virtues that would serve as Khomaktu's ethical backbone. Engraved upon stone tablets and positioned within the roots of Miechtihi, this act symbolized that virtue, like the tree itself, must be deeply rooted to sustain society. The Virtues encompassed both personal conduct and governance, with Mercy, Courage, and Temperance serving as guiding principles for all.

Niroklo's vision extended beyond moral teachings to the physical organization of his kingdom. Settlements were carefully designed to embody the virtues. Central to each village was a towering stone obelisk known as the Pillar of Virtues, etched with the teachings of the Moral Tablet. Communal halls were built around these pillars, serving as both places of assembly and sanctuaries for the practice of justice. Disputes were resolved through reasoned dialogue led by elders, reflecting Niroklo's belief that true battles were against moral decay, not mere physical foes.

Despite Niroklo's vision, the early years were marked by adversity. The untamed land presented harsh winters, droughts, and rival tribes. These challenges, however, did not weaken Khomaktu; they forged it. The concept of Haelshi, or "Shared Struggle," emerged as both a

cultural principle and a way of life. Facing hardships together strengthened the bonds among individuals and even extended to former enemies. Trade networks began to form as once-hostile tribes recognized the benefits of Niroklo's teachings.

As Khomaktu expanded, deviations from the Moral Tablet emerged. Remote communities, facing different challenges, prioritized survival over strict adherence to virtue. Niroklo addressed these variations not with punishment but through education, sending Envoys of Virtue to the farthest reaches of the settlement. These emissaries served as living reminders that the Moral Tablet was not a rigid set of rules but a guiding doctrine meant to adapt to changing circumstances.

In the year 46 AU, Niroklo passed away at the age of 68, a remarkable lifespan given the era's average mortality of 52. His death sent tremors through Khomaktu, and the people gathered around Miechtihiil for a solemn ceremony of mourning. Niroklo's body was interred at the base of the Spirit Tree, symbolizing that the roots of Khomaktu's foundation were forever intertwined with his spirit.

With Niroklo's passing, Khomaktu stood at a crossroads. The unity he had achieved was fragile, reliant on the leadership of new Dakht. The Moral Tablet, Miechtihiil, and the shared memories of Haelshi remained as the lasting legacies of the First Generation. As the kingdom entered a new chapter, the question lingered: could Niroklo's vision endure without the guiding presence of its founding Dakht?

Thus, the First Generation laid the foundation for an evolving society, one destined to face new challenges, conflicts, and interpretations. Yet, Niroklo's vision remained a beacon to those who sought to preserve the unity forged against the odds of a chaotic world.

The Age of Growth (48 - 71 AU)

With the passing of Niroklo in 48 AU, a new era dawned under the guidance of the Elders, who assumed leadership as the Dakhtis. These Elders, chosen for their deep understanding of Niroklo's teachings, carried forward his vision with reverence, but also with the awareness that adaptation was necessary to sustain it. The transition from the singular leadership of Niroklo to a council-based governance marked a significant shift in Khomaklu's approach, one that sought to broaden the responsibility of maintaining unity and virtue.

The period was characterized by a steady expansion of both population and territory. Fertile lands were cultivated along river valleys, transforming scattered tribes into unified settlements. While these communities were built upon the principles of compassion and unity, the Elders recognized the need for a more structured approach to maintaining the virtues of the Moral Tablet. Educational institutions were established as a key priority, aiming to educate the next generation in the teachings of Ijalla and the 32 Virtues. These schools became centers of community life, where children and adults alike learned the tenets of virtue, philosophy, and governance.

However, as the kingdom expanded, new challenges emerged. The influx of diverse settlers brought varying beliefs and customs, leading to a gradual dilution of the original teachings of Ijalla. While some continued to revere Ijalla as the embodiment of existence, others began to interpret the deity in different ways. The Spirit Tree, Miechtihi, once seen as a direct messenger of Ijalla, became a symbol open to diverse interpretations. To some, it remained a spiritual guardian, while others began to see it as a mere relic of nature or a divine judge.

Despite these shifts, the Dakhtis endeavored to maintain the foundational values of Khomakhtu. Roads were constructed to connect distant settlements, not just for commerce, but as symbols of the bonds between people. Communal Halls, such as the Hall of Virtues, were erected in major settlements, serving as centers for discussion, meditation, and resolution of disputes. These halls became vital in reinforcing a sense of collective identity and shared purpose.

The Dakhtis encouraged open dialogue, allowing for debates about the application of the Moral Tablet's virtues in a rapidly evolving world. This approach fostered a culture of reflection, ensuring that even as interpretations began to vary, the core principles of unity and compassion remained intact. However, the seeds of divergence were already being sown, as the rapid expansion introduced new complexities that would shape the trajectory of Khomakhtu in the generations to come. The era of growth ended in 71 AU with the passing of the last Dakhti, marking a transition into a new phase of Khomakhtu's history, one where unity would be tested by the pressures of growth, diversity, and the ever-changing interpretations of virtue.

The Early Strain of Unity (71 - 99 AU)

The 3rd Generation of Dakhtis began its rule in 71 AU, inheriting a kingdom that was still marked by the legacy of Niroklo's vision. Khomaktu was now firmly established, with thriving settlements and well-maintained infrastructure. The focus remained largely on unity, with the Dakhtis working diligently to uphold the Moral Tablet's teachings. Their leadership was centered around community welfare, emphasizing virtues such as compassion, patience, and wisdom as guiding principles for governance.

During this era, Khomaktu's territorial reach expanded further into the fertile plains, drawing new settlers from diverse backgrounds. The kingdom continued to emphasize its ideals of inclusivity, with efforts made to integrate newcomers into Khomaktu's cultural framework. Communal halls, now spread across distant settlements, remained vibrant centers for education, debate, and spiritual connection. The Pillars of Virtues continued to serve as physical and symbolic reminders of the kingdom's commitment to Niroklo's vision.

However, with growth came subtle strains. Regional councils, formed to govern more remote areas, began to develop slightly varying interpretations of the Moral Tablet's principles. These variations were minor, often driven by local circumstances like crop shortages, the need for rapid resource distribution, or unexpected conflicts with nomadic tribes. While such pragmatic adaptations were necessary, they occasionally sparked debates among the Dakhtis and local elders about how closely the Virtues should be adhered to in the face of pressing concerns.

The people's perception of Ijalla also began to diversify during this time. While Miechtihil remained a revered symbol in Khomaklu's heartland, distant settlements started to place more emphasis on local spirits, integrating them with Ijalla's teachings. This adaptation was not viewed as heretical but as a natural evolution of faith, reflecting the distinct experiences of communities living in varied environments. Even so, the growing diversity of interpretations hinted at the challenges of maintaining a unified spiritual outlook as the kingdom expanded.

Despite these minor differences, the 3rd Generation Dakhtis remained committed to the original principles of Khomaklu. They encouraged open dialogue and adaptation while striving to maintain a sense of cohesion. Roads were improved to enhance connectivity between settlements, and educational initiatives were broadened to emphasize both local and central interpretations of virtue. There were occasional disputes, but the Dakhtis approached them with patience and a willingness to mediate rather than impose authority.

By 99 AU, the passing of the last Dakhti of the 3rd Generation marked the end of an era characterized by both growth and the first hints of divergence. While the core ideals of Niroklo still guided Khomaklu, the seeds of future challenges were quietly taking root. As the 4th Generation prepared to take leadership, the question remained whether the kingdom could continue to balance its expanding territory with the enduring legacy of the Moral Tablet.

Era of Genetic Evolution: 99 - 175 AU

The Emergence of Vibrational Abilities (99 - 122 AU)

During the 4th Generation, a remarkable phenomenon emerged among the youth of Khomakṭu: the ability to generate vibrations from their palms. At first, this anomaly was met with fascination and uncertainty, prompting widespread speculation. Guided by the principles of the Moral Tablet, the response was one of inclusion rather than alienation. Elders and Envoys of Virtue ensured that these children were welcomed and supported, adapting the virtues of Temperance and Patience to teach responsible use of vibrations.

The people of Khomakṭu saw these abilities as a divine gift from Ijalla, reflecting the evolving relationship between the people and their understanding of the deity. In distant tribes and kingdoms, interpretations varied—some believed it to be natural inheritance, while others attributed it to cosmic or earthly origins, such as the god Thert' Zie, “The Belly of the Stone.”

As vibrational abilities became more common, their cultural significance deepened, sparking a transformation in Khomakṭu's traditions. This evolution was marked by the invention of the **Srarora**, created by Tsipt'etol, a string musician. The Srarora was a large, curved metal sheet designed to be played through hand-generated vibrations, symbolizing the harmony between traditional culture and technological progress. It quickly became central to festivals and ceremonies, showcasing the artistic potential of vibrational attunements.

Two additional instruments emerged during this era, further exemplifying the integration of vibrational technology into the arts. The **Ibia** was a long, rectangular wooden pipe with an

upward curve toward the end, equipped with a vibration-activated shaker positioned just beyond the mouthpiece. This produced a distinct, distorted bass tone that became iconic in celebratory gatherings.

The **Shyankhikh** was a more formidable creation, crafted from the hollowed heart of the rare **Shyankh**, a massive predatory bird whose sightings were limited to only two recorded accounts during this time. The instrument featured metal cords of varying sizes strung vertically across its structure, accompanied by wooden windows of different sizes set within the heart's natural openings. As one player vibrated the cords, a second player spun the windows, controlling how vibrations escaped and altering the tone and dissonance. The Shyankhikh was so large and loud that players had to be either entirely deaf or use extreme hearing protection to avoid hearing loss or potential brain damage.

Technological Innovation (122 - 147 AU)

By the late 5th Generation, vibrations became integral to everyday life in Khomaktu. The discovery of luminescent stones in rivers led to their use as a primary lighting source. These stones were mined and strategically placed throughout settlements, not only illuminating homes but also enhancing safety and fostering a stronger sense of community.

The medical field also embraced vibrational technology. Healers used vibrations to diagnose and treat internal injuries, significantly improving medical practices. Builders employed vibrations to assess the structural integrity of buildings and bridges, increasing safety and resilience against natural disasters. Vibrations even found their way into agriculture, where farmers learned to use vibrations to stimulate plant growth, boosting crop yields in previously struggling areas.

The rise of vibrational technologies brought changes to social dynamics, with mastery over vibrations becoming a respected skill alongside traditional trades. Despite the growing presence of vibrations in various aspects of life, the people of Khomakṭu maintained a peaceful ethos. Discussions of weaponizing vibrations were nearly nonexistent, as the idea of using them for harm conflicted with the kingdom's foundational principles. The focus remained on advancing society through innovation and harmony.

Militant Defenses (147 - 175 AU)

As the 6th Generation took hold, early astronomers in Khomakṭu began detecting unusual celestial vibrations, interpreting them as potential omens of danger. Though initially dismissed by many, these warnings soon gained credibility when news arrived of the Butrani's sudden landing on Igir's southeastern shores. The Butrani, descendants of a once-oppressive society, had exiled their unwanted—criminals, heretics, and others deemed undesirable—to the continent of Igir centuries earlier. Incensed by the flourishing civilizations they found, the Butrani viewed the Igirians as the heirs to the misfortunes they intended to cast away. Their initial encounter with curious villagers bearing food and gifts ended in brutal violence, marking the start of an unprovoked invasion.

Upon their arrival, the Butrani began cutting down the nearest trees, including a sacred Elder Tree. This was a severe violation of Igirian laws, which decreed that only designated logging forests could be harvested. The cutting of an Elder Tree was punishable by death, as these ancient trees were seen as both spiritual protectors and symbols of the land's heritage. This blatant disrespect provoked a swift military response from Khomakṭu, which had long been built on principles of virtue and peace but was now forced to defend its lands and values.

In response, Khomakū shifted its military strategy to a defensive posture, training soldiers as protectors of both the people and the Moral Tablet. The military's formation included Foot Soldiers, Archers, Citadel Wardens, and the elite Khomakū Kenshi, all of whom were trained to uphold virtues like Courage and Temperance. These warriors acted not only as defenders but as moral exemplars, ensuring that the use of force remained disciplined and justified.

As the Butrani continued their aggressive campaign, the need for a tactical advantage became apparent. Elders debated whether vibrations could be used for military purposes, despite the risks of deviating from Khomakū's peaceful principles. This marked the early stages of a philosophical conflict within the kingdom, as leaders and citizens grappled with the need to balance peace with defense. While philosophical debates remained internal, the urgency of the Butrani invasion set the stage for the first thoughts of weaponizing vibrations—a shift that would not fully manifest until the 7th Generation.

Era of War: 175 - 251 AU

The Butrani War and Strategic Evolution (175 - 201 AU)

The Butrani invasion, which began in the 6th Generation, continued into the 7th Generation, exposing significant vulnerabilities within Khomaktu's military. The kingdom, having enjoyed a period of relative peace for generations, was unaccustomed to sustained warfare. The Butrani, seasoned by centuries of conflict, had a tactical advantage in both experience and brutality. Khomaktu's initial forces suffered heavy losses, with foot soldiers and archers bearing the brunt of the Butrani's unrelenting attacks. Despite their efforts, the defenders struggled to adapt to the Butrani's guerrilla tactics and brutal efficiency. Only the elite **Khomaktu Kenshi** and **Citadel Wardens** managed to hold their ground, owing to their advanced defensive training and vibrational techniques.

Recognizing the need for innovation, the **Council of Dakht Elders** convened urgent meetings to discuss a strategic overhaul. This led to intense debates among the Elders regarding the morality of weaponizing vibrations—a concept that, while controversial, seemed necessary to ensure the survival of Khomaktu. The Elders were divided: some argued that such tactics contradicted the peaceful virtues of the Moral Tablet, while others believed that defending the kingdom justified using every available resource. Ultimately, the urgency of the situation prevailed, and the Elders endorsed the development of vibrational weaponry.

The Council entrusted Nishan, a renowned construction engineer, with spearheading the project. Nishan proposed a variety of vibrational weapons, from handheld devices that channeled vibrations into lethal strikes, to defensive barriers that could repel enemy arrows.

The most significant innovation was the formation of a new military cadre: the **Resonance Channelers**. These specialized warriors underwent rigorous training to harness vibrations not only for attacks but also for healing and protective barriers. The **Resonance Channelers** were to be trained exclusively within Khomakṭu, marking a shift toward a more insular military development, though whispers of these innovations began to spread to distant cities like **Ryamur** and **Le'Anu**.

To integrate the new weaponry and tactics, the Khomakṭu military underwent significant restructuring:

Khomakṭu Kenshi:

- **Resonant Strikes:** Infuse their ornate swords with vibrations, enhancing cutting power to penetrate Butrani armor.
- **Vibrational Parry:** Deflect incoming attacks with minimal physical exertion, redirecting enemy weapons using controlled vibrations.
- **Defensive Quake:** Send vibrational waves through the ground to disorient and unbalance foes.

Citadel Wardens:

- **Steadfast Resonance:** Reinforce greatshields with vibrations, making them nearly impervious to enemy strikes for short periods.
- **Rupturing Thrust:** Send vibrations through pikes to cause severe internal damage upon impact.
- **Defensive Quake:** Unsettle enemy formations by creating controlled ground vibrations.

Foot Soldiers:

- **Earthshaker Stomp:** Use collective stomps to send shockwaves through the ground, destabilizing enemy lines.
- **Shield Resonance:** Vibrate shields to increase resilience and create protective formations.
- **Vibrational Boost:** Enhance sprinting speed with quick, intense pulses from the feet.

Archers:

- **Sonic Arrowheads:** Arrows vibrate upon impact, causing internal damage to armored foes.
- **Vibrational Aim:** Use vibrations to stabilize aim, increasing accuracy in difficult conditions.
- **Aural Distraction:** Fire Aural Arrows that create ear-piercing vibrations, disorienting enemies.

Resonance Channelers:

- **Vibrational Barrier:** Create protective barriers of molecular vibrations to shield allies from attacks.
- **Quake:** Crack the earth beneath enemies, staggering or even trapping them.
- **Resonant Healing:** Accelerate natural healing processes using vibrations among comrades.

The Battle for Igiri Plains

As the war reached a critical point in the late 7th Generation, Khomakṭu prepared for a decisive battle on the **Central-Eastern Igiri Plains**. The Butrani, unaware of the extent of Khomakṭu's vibrational advancements, positioned themselves confidently on the field. The Khomakṭu forces, led by the Elders, stood ready to unveil their new tactics. Musicians, attuned to the vibrations of their instruments, marched behind the front lines.

The **Ibia** players released a deep, distorted bass that resonated across the plains, while the **Srarora** produced ethereal, rising pitches. Finally, the **Shyankhikh**—an immense drum known as the “Heart of Thunder”—released thunderous beats that synchronized with the vibrations of the warriors. This rhythmic barrage reverberated through the air and the earth, causing the Butrani to hesitate. Some faltered, uncertain whether to advance in the face of such overwhelming sound and energy. Others, driven by confusion and fear, retreated.

As the Khomakṭu forces advanced, the vibrational power surged. The Resonance Channelers unleashed **Quakes**, cracking the ground beneath the Butrani lines, while Kenshi and Wardens cut through enemy ranks with resonant strikes. Foot soldiers drove their enemies back with **Earthshaker Stomps**, and archers rained down **Sonic Arrows** that created chaos in the enemy's ranks.

Personal accounts from the battle, recorded by surviving Kenshi and Channelers, reveal the overwhelming sense of unity that enveloped the Khomakṭu forces. Many described feeling “in tune” with their comrades and the very ground beneath them, guided by the vibrations that pulsed through the battlefield.

The Butrani were decisively repelled by the end of the 7th Generation, marking a hard-fought victory for Khomaktu. However, the kingdom emerged from the war with more than just battle scars. As the people and Elders worked to rebuild, a profound skepticism began to take root. Many questioned whether the Moral Tablet's principles still held relevance in a world that had required violent defense. Communal gatherings became arenas for debate, with some citizens calling for a reinterpretation of the virtues to include justifications for war.

The Dakht Elders attempted to reconcile these doubts by introducing new interpretations of the virtues, emphasizing the concept of **Just Defense**—a principle that allowed for the protection of the people without compromising the overall ethos of peace. Yet, these efforts met resistance, as some believed that the Moral Tablet's original tenets were being diluted to justify bloodshed. This philosophical tension set the stage for the ideological divisions of the 8th and 9th Generations, as Khomaktu struggled to maintain its unity amidst growing internal conflict.

The Tides of Discord (201 - 227 AU)

In the aftermath of the Butrani War, Khomaktu was plunged into a profound crisis of faith and identity that reverberated throughout the 8th Generation. While the victory over the Butrani offered a brief respite, it also exposed the kingdom to philosophical and spiritual dilemmas that challenged its core values. With the absence of external threats, the internal divisions that had been growing quietly during the war began to manifest more visibly. At the heart of this discord lay a clash not only between differing interpretations of the **Moral Tablet** but also between two emerging spiritual figures: **Ijalla** and **Ineilla**.

During the 8th Generation, modernized faith began to gain traction among the people—a faith centered around **Ineilla**, a deity that represented a more human-like, personal form of divinity than Ijalla’s abstract and all-encompassing nature. While Ijalla was viewed as the embodiment of existence itself, encompassing both creation and the moral essence of the universe, Ineilla was seen as a more defined figure—one with a clear sense of authority, judgment, and personal involvement in human affairs. Ineilla’s followers believed that she was not the universe, but a deity who judged the faithful and damned those who strayed from her commandments. This shift marked a significant transformation in spiritual and moral beliefs within Khomaktu, emphasizing individual obedience and devotion over communal unity and virtue.

The followers of Ineilla, known as **Ineillis**, began to introduce strict doctrines centered around concepts of sin and damnation. They claimed that those who did not adhere to Ineilla’s commandments were sinners who risked eternal damnation. This marked a stark contrast to the inclusive and philosophical approach of Ijalla’s virtues, which were designed to guide behavior rather than dictate it under the threat of divine wrath. Ineilla’s teachings introduced the idea of moral absolutes, where obedience was paramount, and transgression brought dire consequences.

As the 8th Generation advanced, three distinct factions emerged, each defined by their approach to both governance and spirituality:

1. **Traditionalists (Ijallan Believers):** This faction remained devoted to the original teachings of Ijalla and Niroklo’s vision of peace and unity. They argued that the **Moral Tablet** should remain unchanged and that Khomaktu’s true strength lay in its ability to maintain virtue and moral integrity, even in times of conflict. Traditionalists believed that peace was not just an ideal but the natural path of a virtuous civilization. They saw the rise of Ineilla as a departure from the inclusive

spirit of Ijalla, expressing concerns that the newer faith could lead to stricter societal divisions and a loss of the original purpose of unity.

2. **Pragmatists (Ineillis Adherents):** The Pragmatists were primarily aligned with the growing faith in Ineilla, advocating for a stricter interpretation of morality and governance. They believed that only through rigid adherence to Ineilla's commandments could Khomaktu truly achieve security and spiritual purity. For them, the Moral Tablet needed to be adapted to Ineilla's doctrines, emphasizing religious devotion over philosophical introspection. The Pragmatists viewed their faith as a means to establish order, even if it required punitive measures against perceived sinners and non-believers. They saw the potential for a more unified society under Ineilla, where fear of damnation ensured compliance and cohesion.
3. **Militants (Capitalists):** The third faction consisted of those who prioritized economic growth and material wealth as the true source of power. This faction sought to capitalize on Khomaktu's vibrational technologies and military capabilities to expand the kingdom's influence and resources. For them, virtues were secondary to the pursuit of capital and strength, believing that Khomaktu's prosperity depended on its ability to dominate both economically and militarily. While they did not openly align with Ineilla, many Militants were willing to adopt the new doctrines if it furthered their own ambitions.

As Ineilla's followers grew more zealous, conflicts between the factions became increasingly common. Public debates, which had once been forums for philosophical discussion, turned into heated arguments marked by accusations of heresy and betrayal. The Traditionalists saw the rise of Ineilla as an existential threat to the soul of Khomaktu, warning that her strict doctrines would lead to a society ruled by fear rather than virtue. They argued that the Moral Tablet was meant to foster inner growth, not enforce conformity under the threat of damnation.

In contrast, the Pragmatists believed that Ineilla's commandments were necessary to restore order and discipline to a kingdom that had shown signs of moral decay during the war. They saw the Traditionalists as naive idealists who were unwilling to accept the harsh realities of governance. The Militants, while less concerned with spiritual matters, saw the conflict as an opportunity to consolidate power, often aligning with the Pragmatists when it suited their goals.

The shifting faith toward Ineilla also had tangible effects on daily life. Places of worship dedicated to Ijalla became less frequented, while newly erected temples to Ineilla grew crowded with followers. Rituals that once celebrated the interconnectedness of existence transformed into ceremonies that emphasized obedience and the avoidance of sin. Public punishments for moral transgressions, such as public shaming or excommunication, began to emerge under Ineilla's influence, reflecting a harsher approach to justice that sought to instill fear of divine retribution.

By the end of the 8th Generation, Khomakhu was no longer the unified kingdom envisioned by Niroklo. The rise of Ineilla and the factions it inspired had deeply fractured the society, creating an environment of distrust and ideological warfare. Families were split by differing loyalties, as some embraced Ineilla's doctrines while others clung to Ijalla's original teachings. The Militants, driven by ambition and opportunism, used the divisions to further their own agendas, often at the expense of the kingdom's moral cohesion.

Efforts by the divided council to reconcile these differences were met with limited success. Attempts to merge Ineilla's commandments with the Moral Tablet only fueled further discord among them, as the faithful Dakht saw such changes as sacrilege, while Pragmatists demanded stricter adherence. Meanwhile, the Militants continued to advocate for more aggressive policies, often aligning with whichever faction promised the most power and wealth.

The 8th Generation ended with Khomakhtu teetering on the brink of a full-fledged civil war. The principles of the Moral Tablet, once a guiding light, had become a battleground for competing ideologies. As Khomakhtu prepared to enter its 9th Generation, the question was no longer whether the divisions would deepen, but how far-reaching their consequences would be.

The Tripartite Division (Year 227 - 251 AU)

The end of the 8th Generation left Khomaktu fragmented in spirit and vision, setting the stage for a deeper schism that would reshape the kingdom's foundation. By the 9th Generation, the philosophical and theological debates that had simmered for decades erupted into an ideological split, resulting in the abandoning of Khomaktu. This period marked the first true division of Khomaktu's territory, society, and soul, as each faction sought to assert its vision of Niroklo's legacy in a radically changed world.

The Philosophical Rift: Three Paths Forward

1. **The Traditionalists: Upholding Niroklo's Virtues**

As defenders of the original ideals of Niroklo and the inclusive virtues of Ijalla, the Traditionalists held steadfast to the belief that unity and peace were the ultimate moral objectives. They viewed the Moral Tablet as a living guide that should adapt without compromising its core principles, maintaining that virtue-driven governance could still prevail despite the increasing cynicism.

However, their influence waned amid growing doubts about pacifism's effectiveness in an age shaped by warfare and power struggles. While their message resonated with some commoners and Elders, they were often labeled as naive idealists, disconnected from the harsh realities of a divided land. The Traditionalists sought refuge in the southeastern territories, founding **Nikhissem**, which maintained the leadership title of **Dakht**. Their newfound home became a sanctuary for those devoted to Niroklo's unaltered teachings.

2. **The Pragmatists: Devotion to Ineilla's Authority**

The Pragmatists represented embracing the stricter doctrines of **Ineilla**. This new faith idolized Ineilla not as an evolution of Ijalla's presence but as a personified deity demanding absolute loyalty and submission. The Pragmatists preached that Ineilla's commandments were essential to restoring order and moral clarity, and that strict adherence—under the threat of damnation—was necessary to purify the land of heresy.

The Pragmatists moved to establish their stronghold in the eastern highlands, founding **Ineillnokh**, a theocratic kingdom where Ineilla's teachings became law. Led by the **Ailur**, High Priests of Ineilla, they adopted a rigid governance model that emphasized spiritual discipline, moral policing, and the elimination of dissenters. This faction's doctrine justified not only religious control but also forced conversions, seeing non-believers as enemies of the state, in some cases even killing non-believers in their homes under the guise of "Divine Retribution".

3. **The Militant: Pursuing Power and Capital**

The Militant faction, primarily composed of wealthy merchants, influential officials, and war-hardened leaders, believed that capital and power were the true keys to societal stability. For the Militant, the path to prosperity lay in material dominance, economic control, and the strategic use of military force. The Moral Tablet, once revered as a guiding light, became a convenient tool for manipulation—selectively interpreted to justify aggressive expansion and control over resources.

Centered in the heart of Khomakhtu, the Militant established the title **Dyishram**, a regime governed by an oligarchic council where wealth and influence dictated authority. They sought to consolidate trade routes, control valuable mines, and

secure strategic alliances through both diplomacy and force. To the Militant, the ideals of unity and compassion had become antiquated, replaced by a focus on wealth accumulation and power projection.

The division of Khomakhtu was not just political but deeply personal. Families were torn apart by conflicting loyalties, with members aligning themselves with different factions based on personal beliefs, ambitions, or survival instincts. Brothers fought brothers, parents rejected children, and communities once bound by shared values found themselves on opposing sides of a bitter ideological struggle.

Despite the factions' differences, the Moral Tablet remained a point of reference—albeit with vastly differing interpretations. In Khomakhtu, it symbolized authority, and made changes to directly reflect it; in Ineillnokh, it justified divine rule, making adjustments to justify the stray from virtue in the case of divine retribution; in Nikhissem, it remained a guide to virtuous living. This fragmented understanding of Niroklo's teachings laid the groundwork for the conflicts and transformations that would define the generations to come.

As the 9th Generation concluded, Central Igir was fractured, each faction believing itself to be the true heir of Niroklo's vision. The seeds of war and philosophical strife had been sown, setting the stage for a turbulent era of holy wars, economic rivalries, and ideological battles. With three competing paths laid out—peace, devotion, and power—the once-unified dream of Niroklo had nearly dissolved, leaving a legacy defined not by unity but by division.

Era of Divergence: 251AU - 7 RA

Period of Stabilization (251 - 282 AU)

In the wake of the Tripartite Division during the late 9th Generation, each faction established itself in distinct regions, marking a significant shift in the geopolitical and cultural landscape of Igir. The 10th Generation became a period of stabilization, as the Dakht, Ailur, and Dyishram fortified their respective domains and redefined governance based on their philosophies.

The Ailur, devoted to the rigid doctrine of Ineilla, sought to enforce Ineilla's teachings with unwavering zeal. The people of Ineillnokh believed that their rise was divinely ordained, seeing their faith as not just a spiritual truth but a rightful claim to supremacy over Igir. Their society evolved around a strict hierarchical structure, with the Ailur holding the most authority. The Ailur imposed harsh laws on non-believers, driving many away from their territories and asserting that vibrational abilities were a divine gift exclusive to the devout. This view reinforced their sense of superiority and justified aggressive proselytization, often through force.

The Dakht, determined to preserve the original virtues of Niroklo, established **Nikhissem** as their sanctuary. Nikhissem was designed to reflect the founding ideals of Khomaktu, with open communal spaces, educational centers dedicated to Ijalla's teachings, and governance rooted in the Moral Tablet's inclusive principles, and leaders maintaining the name of Dakht. Here, vibrational abilities were viewed as natural phenomena to be understood rather than as symbols of divine favor. The Dakht focused on sustaining unity and peace, viewing themselves as the rightful keepers of Niroklo's vision. While their influence waned due to fewer numbers and resources, they maintained a strong cultural identity and remained committed to peaceful coexistence and diplomacy.

In contrast, the Dyishram retained control over Khomakku, the largest and most developed territory, claiming the central plains and surrounding settlements. Their rule was defined by a capitalist approach, focused on accumulating wealth and power to maintain control. Vibrational abilities were seen as strategic assets, with little emphasis on religious or moral interpretations. The Dyishram adapted to a more authoritarian style of governance, enforcing strict laws and militarizing key infrastructure to solidify their rule. Khomakku's opulence grew, driven by the expansion of trade networks and the aggressive pursuit of resources. However, the focus on capital and military power came at a cost—education, health, and communal values were deprioritized, leading to rising discontent among the lower classes. While internal power struggles occasionally erupted, the growing ideological tensions between Ineillnokh and Kanumik, to the north, began to unfold into war.

The Religious War:

Ineillnokh vs. Kanumik (282 - 306 AU)

The ideological clash between Ineillnokh and Kanumik reached its boiling point in the 11th Generation, as the two kingdoms prepared for a devastating conflict. The Ailur of Ineillnokh, emboldened by their belief in Ineilla's supremacy, sought to expand their influence beyond the eastern highlands, seeing it as a divine obligation to purify Igir of heresy. Meanwhile, the people of Kanumik, devout followers of **Shoddfrune**, were equally resolute in preserving their religious beliefs and territorial sovereignty.

The Kanumik' faith was centered around the God of Time and Destiny, **Shoddfrune**, and his three celestial deities: **Dlode**, **Dloshe**, and **Lesur**. Each deity represented aspects of time, transition, and illumination, shaping the Kanumikan worldview. For the people of Kanumik, vibrational abilities were seen as cosmic gifts, manifestations of the celestial order, rather than

divine exclusivity. This theological contrast made the war not only a territorial dispute but a battle of existential ideologies—one focused on a singular, rigid deity, and the other on a more cosmic, cyclical spirituality.

Ineillnokh's Barracks: Forces of Divine Zeal

1. **Sanctified Vibroarchers:** Elite marksmen trained to unleash potent vibrational projectiles resembling Ineilla's Spears, which pierced through the battlefield with righteous force. They created magnifying distortion mirrors to enhance their accuracy, raining divine fury upon the heretics.
2. **Divine Sentinels:** Paladins clad in golden armor, wielding heavy claymores and greatshields inscribed with Ineilla's tenets. As the vanguard of Ineillnokh, they advanced with unwavering zeal, believing each swing of their blade was guided by divine will.
3. **Guardians of the Faith:** Defensive Casters who used vibrational barriers to shield their comrades, creating impenetrable bulwarks. They believed these shields symbolized Ineilla's protection, reinforcing their defensive lines.
4. **Divine Healers:** Priests who channeled healing vibrations to mend wounds and restore their allies' vigor. Their gentle resonances were seen as manifestations of Ineilla's mercy, ensuring that the devout could continue the battle.
5. **High Casters of Ineilla:** Masters of both offensive and defensive vibrational arts, they summoned barriers for self-protection and wielded close-range vibrational thrusts and slashes as expressions of Ineilla's wrath.

Kanumik's Barracks: Forces of Celestial Order

1. **Celestial Sentinels:** Vanguard warriors clad in celestial-themed armor, drawing strength from solar or lunar alignments. They wielded vibrationally-enhanced weapons that seemed to shimmer with the deities' blessing.
2. **Luminous Guardians:** Defenders equipped with shields adorned with celestial motifs, capable of projecting barriers of light that reflected the strength of

Shoddfrune's will. They served as the first line of defense, maintaining order and fortitude.

3. **Stellar Casters:** Masters of celestial vibrations, unleashing devastating spells that mimicked cosmic events. Their attacks symbolized the power of stars, creating radiant blasts that scorched the battlefield.
4. **Astral Sages:** Spiritual guides who inspired their comrades with philosophical wisdom and cosmic lore, reinforcing morale amidst the chaos of battle.
5. **Heavenly Harbingers:** Agile scouts who navigated the battlefield with ease, providing intelligence and strategic insights that aligned with the perceived omens of Shoddfrune and his deities.

The war between Ineillnokh and Kanumik was marked by large-scale attunements that tested the boundaries of vibrational abilities:

- **Ineillnokh's Fury:** A devastating collective attack by Ineillnokh's High Casters, generating dissonant waves of vibration that tore through enemy lines, embodying Ineilla's unforgiving wrath.
- **Smite of Shoddfrune:** A coordinated attunement by Kanumik's Stellar Casters, requiring at least 100 casters in rainy conditions to turn raindrops into high-velocity projectiles, symbolizing Shoddfrune's control over time and the elements.

The conflict raged across the borderlands, leaving a trail of destruction and despair. Villages were razed, fields lay fallow, and both sides suffered heavy casualties. The war was not only physical but psychological, as each side's zeal fueled an unrelenting cycle of violence. For the

Ailur, victory meant the ultimate validation of Ineilla's supremacy. For the people of Kanumik, it was a matter of spiritual survival against an invasive, intolerant force.

After years of intense warfare, both kingdoms faced the harsh reality of their unsustainable losses. The leaders of Ineillnokh and Kanumik, recognizing the escalating costs and diminishing returns of the conflict, agreed to meet for peace talks. The treaty negotiations were tense, filled with mutual distrust and lingering animosity, but the devastation of war outweighed the desire for total victory.

The treaty that emerged was fragile, marked by unresolved philosophical and territorial disputes. While it succeeded in halting hostilities, it did little to address the deep-rooted enmity between the two factions. Near simultaneously in Khomaktu, economic strains began to manifest as inflation and unemployment, sowing the seeds of societal unrest.

Khomakluen Precarity (306 - 335 AU)

As the 12th Generation dawned, Khomaktu was enveloped by a wave of economic instability and societal unrest. The preceding conflicts between Ineillnokh and Kanumik had severely disrupted regional trade networks, and the costs of military mobilization had drained the kingdom's coffers. Although Khomaktu had not directly engaged in the war, the ripple effects were palpable. Inflation surged, wages stagnated, and the value of the Igirian Nasho plummeted. As daily necessities grew scarce and prices soared, the once-thriving heart of Igir began to tremble under the weight of poverty and inequality.

The Dyishram, ruling Khomaktu with a focus on capital and expansion, found themselves at a crossroads. Their reliance on vibrational technologies and aggressive trade policies had bolstered the kingdom's prosperity in earlier generations, but now these strategies seemed inadequate to address the growing disparities. The lower classes, who had previously accepted their hardships as a necessary consequence of progress, grew increasingly resentful of the Dyishram's hoarding of resources. Tensions reached a boiling point when grain shortages led to riots in the streets of Khomaktu's capital.

In response, the Dyishram devised a controversial solution: the construction of "Community Housing," a large-scale initiative aimed at providing affordable shelter for the growing population. The plan, however, was rooted more in greed than in genuine care for the populace. The new housing complexes were built hastily, with inferior materials that ensured long-term profits rather than lasting stability. Residents were forced to pay monthly rents that, while lower than market rates, were still burdensome in a time of economic decline. This initiative provided a temporary sense of stability but ultimately deepened the public's mistrust of the Dyishram's intentions.

As the economic crisis worsened, traditionalist voices from Nikhissem began to gain traction among Khomaktu's disillusioned citizens. The Dakht of Nikhissem, though geographically distant, sent Advisors to the capital to preach the virtues of the Moral Tablet in its original, unaltered form. These Advisors argued that the path to recovery lay not in wealth or power, but in the restoration of compassion, unity, and equitable governance. The teachings resonated with many, particularly among the lower classes, who had grown weary of the Dyishram's focus on material gain.

The Ailur of Ineillnokh also sought to exploit the situation, sending missionaries to convert the struggling citizens of Khomaktu to Ineilla's doctrines. The Ailur presented Ineilla's commandments as a source of strength and order in turbulent times, emphasizing the idea that obedience could bring salvation even amidst economic hardship. For some, the harsh certainty of Ineilla's teachings provided a sense of purpose, leading to increased conversions within the capital's outskirts.

By the end of the 12th Generation, Khomaktu was a kingdom beginning to tip on its axis. The economic precarity had not only eroded trust in the Dyishram's leadership but also created fertile ground for ideological infiltration from both Nikhissem and Ineillnokh. The 12th Generation set the stage for a volatile future, where Khomaktu's core values and governance would be watched as never before. While the Dyishram sought to maintain their hold through economic maneuvers, the Dakht and Ailur continued to vie for influence, each with their own vision for the kingdom's salvation in the hopes that someday, they might be able to reclaim what was once theirs.

Subtle Shifts (335 - 358 AU)

With the economic precarity of the 12th Generation still lingering, Khomaktu's populace remained vulnerable to new ideas and influences. The traditionalist Envoys of Virtue from Nikhissem, committed to spreading Ijalla's teachings, traveled to the central territories of Khomaktu in hopes of rekindling the original virtues of unity and peace. They sought to remind the people of Niroklo's vision, emphasizing virtues like Compassion, Temperance, and Fellowship as a remedy for the moral decline caused by the Dyishram's greed.

Simultaneously, Missionaries of Ineilla, driven by the Ailur's zeal to expand their faith, began arriving in Khomaktu. Their message was one of salvation through submission, promising not only spiritual purity but also protection from damnation. For the many disillusioned by the Dyishram's governance, Ineilla's doctrines offered clear rules and a sense of security, albeit through stricter moral enforcement.

The initial interest among the populace was divided. Some gravitated toward the philosophical and inclusive messages of the Envoys, while others found the definitive promises of Ineilla's teachings more compelling. As the Missionaries promised a clearer path to salvation, they gradually won over those who had first leaned toward the Envoys' messages, convincing them that conversion to Ineillis was the more righteous path.

The Envoys, realizing their failure to establish a lasting influence, returned to Nikhissem with a sense of defeat. This setback underscored the growing strength of Ineilla's faith and the Pragmatists' influence in central Igir, setting a more subdued yet significant shift in the kingdom's spiritual landscape.

Adaptation and Assimilation (358 - 385 AU)

The Dyishram, observing the increasing popularity of the Ineillis Missionaries, saw an opportunity to redirect public focus away from the issues of economic instability and their own corruption. Hoping to leverage this growing faith, the Dyishram began constructing Ineillis churches throughout Khomaktu, presenting them as symbols of unity under a common spiritual purpose.

While the Missionaries' presence offered the Dyishram a temporary solution to the growing unrest, it also introduced a new layer of control over the populace. The churches served as centers not just for worship, but also for moral enforcement, reinforcing the Dyishram's authority through a shared belief system that emphasized obedience to both divine and political rule.

During this generation, vibrational abilities were increasingly interpreted as divine blessings from Ineilla rather than natural phenomena. This narrative shift further legitimized the Dyishram's support of Ineilla's doctrines, aligning their authority with the perceived will of the divine. The growing number of Ineillis followers accepted this explanation, seeing the Dyishram's endorsement as a sign of spiritual alignment rather than manipulation.

Spiritual Integration (364 AU - 7 RA)

The expansion of Ineilla's influence throughout Khomaktu reached its peak in the 15th Generation. The Dyishram, having established a network of Ineillis churches, worked to integrate the new faith more deeply into the kingdom's social fabric. Public ceremonies, once centered around the inclusive teachings of Ijalla, now emphasized the virtues of obedience, repentance, and salvation through adherence to Ineilla's commandments.

While this shift appeared to bring a sense of spiritual cohesion, it also led to the gradual erosion of Khomaktu's foundational values. The Moral Tablet, originally focused on virtue as a means to achieve inner growth and societal harmony, became a secondary guide—adapted to fit Ineilla's stricter doctrine. The Dakht of Nikhissem continued their efforts to promote Ijalla's inclusive teachings, but their influence diminished as the Dyishram maintained control through religious conformity.

The Missionaries' success in converting Khomaktu's citizens had also altered social dynamics. People began to see non-believers as morally inferior, creating subtle but significant divisions within communities. Traditional rituals lost their relevance, replaced by ceremonies that focused more on public demonstrations of faith and the fear of divine retribution. This change was of ill promise to the Dyishram, as rebellion was less likely if the populace no longer stood on a united front.

As the 15th Generation concluded, Khomaktu appeared more stable, and the Dyishram in their guilty pleasure of turning attention elsewhere, they began to refer to the time as the Reign of Ambition, further exciting the population with false promises of salvation and success. But beneath this façade lay a kingdom increasingly shaped by authoritarian spiritual practices and the pragmatic use of faith for political control. The Dakht of Nikhissem remained isolated, their voices of peace overshadowed by the drumbeat of Ineilla's strict doctrine, setting the stage for the internal and external conflicts that would define the 16th Generation and beyond.

Era of Disparity: 0 - 121 RA

Akkho's Reign (7 - 28 RA)

The rise of Akkho Budeshi as the new Dyishram marked a turning point in Khomakhtu's history. His ambition and greed were unparalleled, with a reign characterized by a sudden and unprovoked assault on Ineillnokh. The attack unfolded with shocking speed, as Akkho's forces, driven by the promise of wealth and glory, swept through the theocratic kingdom in just two days. The defenders of Ineillnokh, caught off-guard by the sudden onslaught, struggled in vain to hold their ground. Citizens, filled with disbelief and terror, watched as their sacred halls crumbled under the merciless advance of Khomakhtu's forces.

Akkho's motivations were clear—domination, wealth, and the demonstration of his power. He harbored no personal vendetta against Ineillnokh; it was merely a target of opportunity. In the aftermath of his swift victory, Akkho indulged in extravagant celebrations, seemingly indifferent to the destruction he had caused. The once-proud kingdom of Ineillnokh lay in ruins, its people scattered across Igir, many forced to abandon their beliefs in exchange for survival. Some found refuge among northern or southern tribes, while others fled to Kanumik, compelled to adapt to new cultures or take up mercenary work to sustain themselves.

Akkho's rule over Khomakhtu was a facade of prosperity built on neglect and deceit. While new districts sprang up rapidly, their structures were shoddy, designed for temporary grandeur rather than lasting stability. Citizens soon noticed that cosmetic repairs barely concealed the deeper decay, mirroring the state of Khomakhtu under Akkho's corrupt governance. This decay was both literal and symbolic, reflecting the moral and social disintegration that accompanied his pursuit of power. As the Ineillnokhian refugees sought new lives, the broader ethos of survival over honor began to shape the cultural landscape of Igir.

The arrival of Ineillnokhian mercenaries and displaced citizens in other parts of Igir further spread the sense of moral decline. They brought with them tales of Akkho's cruelty and Ineillnokh's fall, casting Khomaktu as a kingdom that had abandoned virtue for greed. While some tribes sought to maintain discipline and order, others adapted fragments of Niroklo's teachings merely to preserve basic societal functions. The once-strong ideals of unity and mutual respect gradually faded into distant memories, and Igir began to splinter further.

As Akkho's reign drew to a close, whispers of discontent grew among Khomaktu's people. The Dyishram's authority was increasingly perceived as corrupt, but fear and oppression kept potential rebellions in check. The era left a legacy of instability, setting the stage for the harsh measures that would define subsequent generations.

The Seeds of Defiance (28 - 53 RA)

The 17th Generation in Khomaktu was defined not by fervent faith but by indulgence and control. The Dyishram, though not true devotees of Ineilla, continued to use her doctrine as a convenient tool for maintaining their authority. However, their primary focus was on fostering depravity rather than genuine spiritual adherence. Gambling halls, brothels, and taverns flourished as the Dyishram poured resources into expanding the entertainment districts, offering the people instant gratification and distractions from the harsh realities of daily life.

Amid this atmosphere of moral decay, a faint undercurrent of dissent began to emerge. Small groups of citizens quietly resisted the Dyishram's rule, dissatisfied with the superficial indulgence and lack of moral integrity. These gatherings were secretive and disorganized, lacking the unity or strength necessary for significant change. Nevertheless, they represented the earliest inklings of rebellion—a discontent rooted not in spiritual zeal but in a longing for a more virtuous and just society.

The 17th Generation thus became an era of growing disillusionment beneath a facade of prosperity, marking the early stages of a larger movement that would soon come to challenge the Dyishram's rule.

Draconic Enforcement and Silent Resistance (53 - 78 RA)

As the 18th Generation unfolded, Khomakhu's population once again reached critical levels, causing food shortages, widespread poverty, and escalating despair. In response, the Dyishram, led by Kinul Shett, Oiye Chaldn, Ikidi Onduno, and Ayas Lamal, implemented drastic birthing laws to curb overpopulation. These measures were not only harsh but shockingly ruthless: mothers who bore more children than permitted faced the unthinkable punishment of execution alongside their newborns.

The Dyishram framed this policy as a necessary evil to ensure the survival of Khomakhu's limited resources. However, this excuse failed to mask the brutal reality that lay beneath: fear and control. The brutal nature of the laws sent a chilling message to neighboring kingdoms and tribes—an unspoken warning that Khomakhu would enforce its rule without hesitation or mercy. It even inspired condemnation from the Khasaldi bastion to the north, Has'mir, which despite its own harsh laws, found Khomakhu's actions extreme.

While this oppressive regime proved effective in reducing population growth, it left deeper scars on the kingdom's social fabric. Crime became more covert, with offenders devising intricate plans to evade justice. At the same time, a new breed of criminals emerged: underground leaders who became symbols of silent defiance, working within the shadows to undermine the Dyishram's authority. These figures were as elusive as they were dangerous, yet they managed to inspire hope among the oppressed, showing that even the most draconian measures could not fully suppress the human spirit.

Despite the fear that gripped the land, quiet acts of resistance persisted. Secret meetings, known as *Whispered Councils*, became more common, where the common folk discussed the possibility of reform or even open rebellion. Though such gatherings were small and rare, they marked a shift from passive discontent to a more active—albeit still hesitant—challenge against the Dyishram’s rule.

By the end of the 18th Generation, Khomaktu was a kingdom defined by fear, submission, and silent rebellion. The Dyishram’s grip remained strong, but cracks were beginning to show. The oppressive governance that had kept the kingdom in line for generations was now facing a subtle but growing threat from within—one that would set the stage for greater resistance in the coming generations.

Foreign Event - Significant Innovation: 78 - 84 RA

Khasaldi Zekaril: Mastery of the Storms

In the heart of the northeastern deserts of Igir, the Khasaldi tribe, known for their nomadic resilience and formidable warriors, introduced a groundbreaking innovation that would reshape Igirian warfare: the Khasaldi Zekaril, or "Khasaldan Charge." This formidable weapon was reputed to harness the power of lightning, an embodiment of the Ravathil, the lightning spirits believed to dwell within storms. The invention emerged as a result of Hassard Rishti's ambition to elevate his people by wielding the power of the sky itself.

Hassard, a 24-year-old warrior driven by dreams of greatness, first envisioned the Zekaril during a journey beyond the familiar sands of the Khasaldi desert. The encounter with a fearsome storm near the ocean's edge inspired him to create a weapon that could capture and discharge the raw energy of nature. Guided by this vision, he returned to the desert, eager to transform his revelation into reality.

The Khasaldi Zekaril was not merely a technological achievement; it became a symbol of Khasaldi strength and spiritual evolution. Crafted from the rare piezoelectric crystals found deep within a secret Khasaldi mine, the Zekaril converted vibrations into surges of electrical energy. To the Khasaldi, it represented their mastery over the continent's natural resonance, transforming Igir's vibrations into directed power.

The weapon's construction was complex, requiring both advanced knowledge of vibrational attunement and skilled craftsmanship. The device was integrated at the base of a weapon's blade, just above the hilt, and functioned by accumulating vibrational energy generated during battle. Upon reaching a critical threshold, the Zekaril discharged stored energy as an electric shock, enhancing the lethality of the weapon. The discharging mechanism could be

activated through a specific gesture, such as a twist of the hilt or a predefined motion, allowing strategic deployment in combat.

The introduction of the Zekaril marked a significant evolution in Khasaldi battle tactics. Elites equipped with this weapon formed new combat formations that leveraged its unique capabilities, striking terror into opposing forces. In the early stages of its deployment, rival factions often mistook the Zekaril's electrical discharges for dark magic or divine wrath. This initial confusion and fear amplified its psychological impact, giving the Khasaldi a significant advantage in both duels and larger battles.

However, the Zekaril's effectiveness relied heavily on prolonged engagements, where sufficient vibrational energy could be accumulated. In shorter or less intense conflicts, its potential was limited, creating tactical challenges for its users. Despite this limitation, the Khasaldi adapted, developing strategies to maximize the Zekaril's impact during critical moments of battle.

The Khasaldi revered the Zekaril as a sacred weapon, and only the most accomplished warriors were permitted to wield it. Attaining the rank of "Elite" within the tribe was a prestigious achievement, requiring a warrior to protect the Khasaldi people from certain death. Those who achieved this status were honored in a grand ceremony that involved both the tribe's spiritual leaders and the artisans who crafted the Zekaril. The ritual emphasized the sacred bond between the warrior, the weapon, and the ravathil spirits believed to empower it.

The Zekaril's introduction into Igirian warfare had a profound impact on the continent's military landscape. News of its existence spread rapidly, sparking a wave of curiosity, fear, and ambition among neighboring tribes and kingdoms. The initial exclusivity of the Zekaril to the Khasaldi led other factions to develop theories ranging from divine intervention to secret

attunement rituals. This confusion, coupled with the Khasaldi's intentional secrecy regarding its construction, fueled an era of innovation as rival factions sought to develop their own equivalents.

The most notable attempt at replicating the Zekaril's effects came in the form of fire-based weaponry, where rival factions crafted similar attachments that stored oil and ignited upon impact. While these fire weapons offered an extended burn effect, they lacked the surprise and raw power of the Zekaril's electric discharge. Nevertheless, they represented the first step toward a broader arms race centered around vibrational technology.

The Khasaldi Zekaril stood as both a testament to the tribe's ingenuity and a catalyst for the evolving methods of combat in Igir. It symbolized the relentless pursuit of power and survival that defined the continent's inhabitants, as well as the dynamic interplay between technology, strategy, and spirituality. Though the Zekaril remained a rare and highly sought-after asset, its mere existence marked a turning point in Igir's history, paving the way for future conflicts that would be defined by technological dominance as much as by traditional warfare.

By the end of the 19th Generation, the Zekaril had secured its place in the annals of Igirian history, with whispers of its potential spreading across the land. The Dyishram of Khomaklu, intrigued by the Khasaldi's success, sought to develop a similar weapon, but their efforts remained largely unsuccessful. The Khasaldi's mastery of vibrational technology and spiritual resonance kept the Zekaril as a defining symbol of their culture—a symbol that promised both power and peril in the generations to come.

The Rise and Fall of Dhari

Year 101 RA

Kenko Allias hadn't planned on becoming a warrior. His calloused hands were meant for bartering goods, not wielding blades. He had learned to make a modest living, peddling small wares from the markets to the alleys of Khomaklu's entertainment district. It was a life of hard work but enough to support Lili, his wife. Lili was a seamstress, stitching the lavish garments worn by performers in the district. They were simple folk, their dreams no grander than raising a family and finding solace in each other's arms after long days.

But one night shattered that dream. Lili's usual path home from work took her through a lawless part of the city, a neglected underbelly where the Dyishram's presence was scarce. It was there, amidst the shadows, that she was attacked. She came home bruised and broken, her clothes torn, her face streaked with silent tears. Kenko's world darkened that night as he sat beside her, his hands shaking as he cleaned her wounds. His sorrow soon turned to a quiet rage—a fire that burned hotter with each passing day.

Kenko's anger wasn't reckless. It was methodical, simmering like a pot on the verge of boiling over. He despised how the Dyishram allowed such lawlessness to fester, indifferent to the harm it caused to the most vulnerable. But he had to hide his rage; outward defiance would only invite further suffering. So, he channeled his anger into training. He stole a pair of swords from a Khasaldi mercenary, practicing in secret. In the dead of night, Kenko would strike the air with deliberate, precise movements—each swing a silent promise of vengeance.

When Lili realized she was pregnant, Kenko felt a mix of dread and hope. The child, whom they named Dhari, was both a reminder of the violence they endured and a symbol of their will to survive. Kenko swore to Lili that he would protect Dhari, not just from the streets that had taken their innocence, but from the very system that allowed such cruelty.

As Dhari grew, Kenko's lessons took a different form. He told Dhari stories of Igir—tales of kingdoms, warriors, and rebels who rose against corruption. Dhari's eyes would widen with each tale, his young mind absorbing the ideas of justice and rebellion. Kenko's training also intensified; he taught Dhari Idish'ko, a combat style focused on disabling rather than killing. Kenko insisted on this method because it mirrored his own philosophy—justice through restraint, retribution without needless bloodshed.

Dhari, now a young man, bore a striking resemblance to his mother. He had her sharp eyes, her dark hair, and her stubborn determination. Kenko often caught himself staring at Dhari's face, a mixture of pride and guilt washing over him. He knew Dhari was aware of his origins. Lili, on her part, remained a quiet but resolute presence. She refused to let her trauma define her, pouring her strength into raising Dhari with the same resilience that had kept her alive.

By the time Dhari turned 21, whispers of rebellion began to stir among the lower districts. People were tired of the Dyishram's deceit and growing authoritarianism. Dhari, charismatic and driven, became a natural leader among the discontented. His followers were a mix of the disillusioned—laborers, street performers, and even some defected Kenshi. Dhari's speeches were impassioned, his words a blend of the teachings of Niroklo and the raw anger that pulsed through Khomaktu's veins.

One evening, as Dhari prepared to address a growing crowd, Kenko stood beside him. "This isn't just about vengeance, Dhari," Kenko said, his voice rough with age and emotion. "It's about giving people a reason to believe again."

Dhari nodded, his jaw set. "I know, Father. But they must also see that there's a price for betraying the people."

The rebellion escalated rapidly. Dhari's forces grew to nearly 4,000, a mix of rebels who had lost everything and those who believed they had everything to gain. They moved with precision, targeting the Dyishram's barracks and strategic points. Among Dhari's closest allies was Inaija, a fierce warrior and mother to a newborn. Her dedication was unyielding; she trusted Dhari to bring about the change they all sought, even as she sent her husband Duael and son into hiding for safety.

But tragedy struck swiftly. The Dyishram's elite Kenshi tracked down Kenko and Lili, slaughtering them in cold blood. Dhari discovered their bodies in their small home, his father's sword still clutched in his hand, his mother's lifeless form cradled beside him. The scene broke something inside Dhari—he fell to his knees, silent tears streaming down his face.

The rebellion's moral compass had been Kenko's restraint. With his death, Dhari lost that anchor. Desperation drove him to consider a forbidden attunement—Cataclysmic Sunder, a technique shrouded in legend and feared for its catastrophic consequences. He believed it was the only way to end the Dyishram's tyranny decisively. Dhari gathered his followers, leading them to the city's center under the pretense of a grand ceremony.

The air was thick with anticipation as Dhari's voice rose above the crowd. “Di anak khalo tesh vi den tiei. Akkha vi'sen ti lan tesh vi den tiei. Oy'iyus i khata anak vi den tiei. Chio onu tola lei an dalo kashti kei.”

His followers repeated the chant, their voices merging into a haunting chorus. As the ground began to tremble, some looked around nervously, but Dhari pressed on. In a final, devastating act, he slammed his hand to the ground, shouting:

“Isha kai da tio khalo tak ak Shi KAI'IDAI!”

The earth responded with a violent roar. The ground split open, swallowing Dhari's rebels in a massive chasm. Khomaklu crumbled as shockwaves rippled outward. Dhari stood alone amidst the ruins, his eyes vacant, the cries of his fallen followers echoing in his ears. He had sought justice but found only destruction.

For the next 20 years, Dhari remained atop his self-made tower in the ruined city, numbing himself with vibrations that slowed his aging. He waited for someone worthy to challenge him—an adversary who could resist the temptations that had led him astray.

Dhari's legacy was one of shattered ideals, a testament to the danger of unrestrained ambition and the cost of vengeance that lost its moral compass. His story left a scar on Igir, a warning to those who would seek power without the guidance of virtue.

State of Igir

Year 121 RA

Igir remains in the aftermath of cataclysm, fragmented and reeling from the generational events that have shaped its current state. The continent's kingdoms, factions, and newly formed tribes now struggle to navigate an uncertain and scarred landscape. While some remnants cling to old beliefs, others seek new beginnings amidst the ruins of shattered lands.

Khomaktu

Once the center of Igirian civilization, Khomaktu is now a desolate wasteland. Dhari's Cataclysmic Sunder has left little standing, the once-prosperous city now resembling a skeletal ruin. Its streets, once bustling with life, are filled with rubble and overgrowth, as nature reclaims what was lost to ambition. The Dyishram's presence is almost entirely erased, their authority obliterated, leaving behind only fragmented survivors scattered in makeshift shelters.

The Bastion of Omu

The Khasaldi Bastion to the north, now known as the Bastion of Omu stands one of the few strongholds of stability on the continent apart from Ryamur, despite the devastation of Dhari's rebellion. Under Omu's guidance, this fortress has become a sanctuary for those who revere Dhari as the "New Messiah." The Bastion's inhabitants are a mix of Khasaldi warriors, Ineillis defectors, and former Dhari loyalists, all united by a shared belief that Dhari's vision was an attempt to purge the world of its corrupt systems.

The Bastion thrives as a center for martial training and vibrational innovation, with warriors focusing on mastering the Zekaril and other vibrational technologies. Omu himself speaks of redemption, arguing that Dhari's message was not one of destruction but of rebirth, misunderstood by those who feared his ambition. The Bastion's influence grows as it attracts those disillusioned by the other factions' failures, offering hope for a new beginning amidst the ruins of Igir.

Tribes of Igir

- **Ao'li:** Known for their reverence of vibrational mastery, they are determined to adapt Igir's technologies for both warfare and agriculture, seeing it as a means of reclaiming stability.
- **Taili:** A spiritualist tribe, they emphasize resilience and communal living, focused on preserving ancestral wisdom while avoiding the trappings of past conflicts.
- **Taryth:** A warlike tribe born out of necessity, their members are primarily former mercenaries and refugees who banded together after the fall of Khomaktu. They are driven by survival, often resorting to raids and quick skirmishes to secure resources.
- **Raoch:** This tribe has embraced the remnants of Khasaldi vibrational technology, attempting to forge alliances with the Bastion of Omu in hopes of reclaiming lost power.
- **Fien:** A group composed mostly of former Attal seafarers, they cling to coastal regions, focusing on trade and defense in a bid to rebuild a semblance of their maritime traditions.

These tribes reflect the evolving landscape of Igir, with each vying for territory, influence, and survival in a world that no longer resembles its past.

The continent stands divided, yet not entirely devoid of hope. Amidst ruins and scattered peoples, a new dawn could still be possible—one forged by the determination of those who remain. Igir's lands may be marred, its dreams shattered, but the promise of renewal lingers in the hearts of its survivors.

With the fall of old powers and the emergence of new factions, Igir's story is far from over. As the people grapple with the consequences of Dhari's legacy and the ambitions that have shaped their past, they stand at a crossroads. Will unity be reclaimed, or will the continent continue its descent into discord? The fate of Igir now rests with those willing to rise from the ashes and build anew, driven by ambition, wisdom, or desperation.

The true journey of Igir begins now, as the *Disciples of Igir* step forward to shape its destiny, navigating the remnants of the past and the possibilities of the future.

- Chapter 1 -

Seeds of Virtue

The first light of dawn crept over the horizon, painting the village of Shikad in soft hues of gold and amber. Young Indu stood at the edge of the fields, the cool earth beneath his bare feet, as he and his father observed Aldriel, one of Shikad's hired mercenaries, confronting a nomadic bandit who presumed a village of peace would be an easy target. The bandit darted between two small homes on the outskirts of town, making a desperate bid for the southern road. However, he was not as swift as he had hoped. Aldriel effortlessly caught up to him, seizing the back of his shirt collar. "You go no further!" he shouted, dragging the bandit back to town. Indu watched, inspired and filled with a sense of awe at the sight of justice being served. He glanced at his father, who stood beside him, gesturing to the goddess Ijalla above with his weathered hands, imbued with the silent wisdom of their ancestors. "Remember, Indu," his father's voice was a low murmur, almost lost in the morning breeze, "justice is more than a principle; it is the heartbeat of our people." The words hung in the air, resonating deep within Indu's soul, marking the beginning of a journey that would take him far beyond the familiar confines of their peaceful village.

Shikad was no perfect place, though. Many of the people were greedy in their own right, but none more so than Imri, the village elder. Even in his old age, he was a sturdy fellow, known for his kindness—though at a price. Imri would accept trades for good deeds, but mostly he

preferred nasho, the local coin. To him, kindness was a tool, one he used to remain the wealthiest of the people, even if true wealth eluded him. Despite its small size, Shikad was a tradetown in the southeastern region of Igir, lying several days north of Iburil, a large southeastern port town, and a week south of Shima, a small waystation for travelers headed to Ryamur on the northeastern shores. Ryamur stood as the oldest remaining kingdom after the cataclysm twelve years ago.

Despite its flaws, Shikad was home, a place where Indu learned the complexities of human nature. He often observed the villagers' interactions, noting the subtle exchanges of nasho and favors that defined their relationships. Imri's influence was palpable; his decisions swayed the village's daily life, from trade negotiations to communal gatherings. Indu's father frequently reminded him to look beyond appearances, teaching him that true justice was not swayed by wealth or power. As the sun climbed higher, casting long shadows across the fields, Indu felt a growing determination within him—a desire to seek a justice that transcended the petty dealings of his village.

Indu's curiosity knew no bounds as a boy, driving him to seek knowledge wherever he could find it. One market day, while wandering through the bustling stalls of Shikad, he encountered a tradesman selling books and scrolls. The tradesman's stall was a treasure trove of forgotten lore, each piece whispering tales of the past. Indu's eyes were drawn to a weathered scroll, its edges frayed and its ink faded. With careful hands, he unrolled the scroll and began to read.

The scroll told the story of Khomaklu, a city that had once been the jewel of Igir. The city was described as a marvel of engineering and artistry, its structures crafted from intricately interlocked stone bricks. These bricks formed buildings that spiraled upwards like great stone vines, reaching towards the sky. The rooftops were adorned with intricate carvings that depicted the celestial patterns of the goddess Ijalla, and the walls were etched with runes of protection and prosperity. Some structures were vast, tiered terraces that seemed to float above

the ground, connected by a network of delicate stone bridges and arches that defied conventional architecture. However, much was also mentioned of the religious transition, that Ijalla lost her power over the people, and it was handed to her cleverly crafted sister, Inalla.

The scroll painted a vivid picture of a city alive with activity. The streets of Khomaklu were lined with bustling markets, where traders from distant lands exchanged exotic goods and vibrant stories. The air was filled with the scent of spices and the sounds of artisans at work, their hammers and chisels creating melodies of craftsmanship. Scholars roamed the grand halls of learning, their robes flowing as they debated the mysteries of the universe, while children played in the expansive courtyards, their laughter echoing off the stone walls.

Central to the founding of Khomaklu was Niroklo, a visionary leader who believed in the power of knowledge and moral integrity. Niroklo established Khomaklu as a beacon of enlightenment, a place where wisdom and virtue would guide its people. At the heart of his teachings was the Moral Tablet, a sacred artifact inscribed with 32 virtues that embodied the principles of justice, compassion, and balance. The Moral Tablet was not just a set of rules but a living doctrine, influencing every aspect of life in Khomaklu. Niroklo's vision was for a society where people lived in harmony, guided by the timeless truths of the Moral Tablet, and where every action reflected a deep respect for the interconnectedness of all life.

But Indu, confusedly reread several sections of the historic scroll, which suggested a shift in the moral doctrine woven into the fabric of its society by Niroklo. He could not understand why the leaders of this kingdom would wish to change what seemed an honorable code to life. The scroll made mentions, too, that these changes seemed to benefit the kingdom's wealth and stature as a result. Indu, though still confused, began to make an understanding of the words written before him. These changes were not intended for the growth of the people, but for the growth of the leaders' vanity. The Dyishram Council benefited most, as virtue fell away from the moral tablet, slowly but surely.

Yet, as Indu read, he felt a deep connection to the ancient city. The tales of Khomaklu's founding, its growth through nine generations, and its role as a center of knowledge and culture captivated him. The city's innovative spirit and architectural brilliance seemed to call

out to him, igniting a spark of inspiration. Indu could almost see the great spires reaching towards the heavens, hear the hum of daily life, and feel the pulse of a city that once thrived with purpose and vision.

This discovery fueled Indu's determination to learn more about the world beyond his village. He knew that the history of Khomaklu held keys to understanding the broader tapestry of Igir's past, and perhaps his own future. The scroll became a cherished possession, a symbol of the knowledge he sought to uncover, and the journey that lay ahead of him.

Indu's upbringing in Shikad was a blend of simplicity and profound learning. His father, Duael, a man of unwavering principles, was his primary mentor, instilling in him the virtues of the Moral Tablet which were taught to him as a boy by his father too. From a young age, Indu was taught to value justice, compassion, and integrity above all else. Mornings were spent working in the fields, where his father imparted practical skills and life lessons. "The earth gives to those who respect it," he would say, his voice steady and reassuring. Afternoons were reserved for stories and teachings, where Indu would sit wide-eyed as his father recounted the legends of their ancestors and the principles of Niroklo. The evenings were a time of community, where the villagers gathered to share their day's labors, celebrate small victories, and support each other through hardships. Indu learned the importance of community and the strength that came from unity and shared purpose.

Indu's mother, Inaija, though no longer with them, left a lasting legacy in his life. Her gentle spirit and the stories his father shared about her kindness and wisdom were a constant source of inspiration. She had been a healer, known for her ability to mend both bodies and hearts, and her influence was a guiding light for Indu. He often found himself visiting her memorial, a simple stone marked with her name, where he would sit and reflect on the lessons of compassion and empathy she had imparted to him.

Despite the small size of Shikad, Indu's thirst for knowledge was boundless. He would spend hours talking to the village elders, absorbing their wisdom and learning from their experiences. He befriended travelers who passed through Shikad, eager to hear their tales of distant lands and diverse cultures. These interactions broadened his horizons and deepened

his understanding of the world beyond his village. Some of these travelers were mercenaries, one of whom stayed in Shikad for quite some time. His name was Hirda.

Some of these travelers were mercenaries, one of whom stayed in Shikad for quite some time. His name was Hirda. One day, Indu stumbled upon Hirda training in the woods as he was headed out to forage for mushrooms and wild herbs. He watched in awe as the man repeatedly pummeled a dead log with his palms.

“I’ve never seen anything like this before,” Indu said. “Can you teach me whatever it is you’re doing?” he asked, awkwardly but confidently.

“This is known as Arratla, a hand-to-hand Hamri (Martial Art),” Hirda responded kindly. “You seem like a strong young boy. Why don’t you take a crack at this tree?” he said with a humble but commanding tone.

Indu approached the tree and struck it with his palms, his wrists slightly downward as he struck. “Ow!” he exclaimed.

“Your wrists were too low,” Hirda pointed out. “Your wrists must remain at shoulder height; otherwise, your hands will overextend backwards. This is why you felt pain.”

Indu looked at him fondly, trusting his judgment, and struck again. This time, his wrists felt more solid, and he felt no more pain than from his undertrained palms slamming against the hard wooden surface of the log.

He spent many months with Hirda, even through the winter, training against the logs of fallen trees. By the time Hirda had taken his leave from Shikad, Indu knew much of what he needed to improve and continued to train well after Hirda’s departure.

The following summer, Indu met yet another guide, but this one was different. The man refused to offer his name, background, or history. One day, Indu witnessed the stranger deflect a falling timber post from hitting a local seamstress. He knew there was more to the man than just strength. The stranger spoke with Indu about the histories of vibration

attunements known as Pyri, which were beginning to disappear after the cataclysm due to their dangerous potential if misused.

Indu felt compelled to watch the man from a distance as he trained in the woods outside of town. At first, he observed the man meditating and then practicing counters against incoming attacks with logs tied to fall against him. Indu attempted to replicate the man's actions but could not activate vibrations.

One day, Indu approached the clearing where he had seen the man training. He could hear the man exclaiming "muoi" (like kiai, a short shout uttered when performing an assault) as he trained. But when Indu entered the clearing, the man was nowhere to be seen until he felt a strong hand grab his shoulder.

"What are you doing here?" the man asked with a tone of frustration. "You're disrupting my peace. Leave now." And then the man walked away.

"How are you doing this?" Indu asked abruptly. "I've been trying to replicate your motions, but you not only move with such grace but are doing things far beyond my understanding!"

The man turned angrily, stomping toward Indu with a piercing glare. "You should not be attempting to do things you can't even begin to understand!" he yelled.

Indu walked back into town, defeated. But it suddenly struck him that the scribe was in the market stalls selling scrolls. He thought, "Perhaps there's something in there that would help me activate those vibrations." He searched through the scrolls and came across one with an unfamiliar name, titled "To Tread in Silence." This must be what he was looking for. It gave a detailed guide on creating and manipulating vibrations through his feet and described how counter-vibrations could nullify the sounds of his footsteps, erasing his presence almost entirely.

Indu practiced this ability nearly all hours of the day, starting by approaching livestock at a steady walking pace and gradually working into running toward them without startling them.

Once proficient with livestock, he tested this ability with people, often startling them as he approached to talk.

Feeling confident, he approached the man in the woods again, attempting to watch him as he trained. This time, he didn't intend to hide his approach. Indu, ever vigilant, walked through the dense underbrush of Shikad's ancient forests. Each step he took was deliberate yet eerily silent, using the Silent Pulse Pyri to nullify each footfall.

He walked until he was but ten feet behind the man and stood there motionless for only a few seconds. The man instinctively burst backward with an abrupt release of vibration to his front and turned to face Indu midair, tackling him to the ground. The man raised a fist while holding Indu by the collar until he recognized the face of who had snuck behind him.

"I'm impressed, actually," he said calmly. "Not many are capable of approaching so close without my noticing."

Indu gave him a look of both pride and excitement. "Perhaps you could teach me some of your abilities now?" he asked, looking at the man with endearing respect.

"No," the man said bluntly. "I will not teach you," and walked away toward the logs he was training against, only this time he didn't wait for Indu to leave before beginning his training again.

Indu sat there watching the man most days as he continued to train. If he asked questions or spoke at all, the man would either ignore him or blast one of the training logs in Indu's direction. Indu thought it best not to disturb the man in his training but watched intently. He took notes of form, movement, sounds, and even the man's breathing.

After several days of watching, Indu stopped appearing behind the man. He sought to train on his own, against logs of his own. A week passed, Indu bruised and out of breath from the repeated strikes of fallen logs knocking him to the ground. The man curiously approached Indu's training grounds and startled him with a sudden taunting remark, "You're doing it wrong."

Indu jumped and turned to face the man. "Then teach me to do it correctly," he said with a snide tone.

The man looked at him with a slight smirk and motioned for Indu to follow. Indu responded in kind, following the man back to his training grounds. The man didn't speak at all or describe what he was doing, but instead showed Indu directly what he was doing to parry the fallen logs with his forearms.

Indu attempted to replicate the man's motions on the logs next to him but continued to fail. The man then grabbed his arms and pulsed vibrations through his hands to Indu's forearms, showing Indu where to focus directly. Indu attempted to respond with vibrations through his forearms, and the man smiled and chuckled. "Weak," he said, setting Indu's hands on his forearms. The force of the vibrations was so powerful that Indu's hands couldn't maintain their grip as they went completely numb almost immediately.

"That look of shock is exactly as I expected," the man said with a judgmental tone. "Set a stick atop your forearms, with them resting on the ground. The day that stick only comes down to touch your arms by the force of gravity, come and speak to me."

Determined to prove himself, Indu continued his arduous training regimen. The man's cryptic instructions echoed in his mind as he relentlessly practiced with sticks laid atop his forearms as requested. He sought to vibrate his forearms so violently that even the strange man would come to acknowledge his ability. Days turned into weeks, and though his progress was slow, Indu's resolve never wavered. The sticks he began with were small, and light. When he began to make them appear as if they were levitating above his arms, he moved on to small branches, and later onto larger and heavier branches. But he was not quite reaching the level that he wished to attain. He began to grow impatient with his training, and at one point even damaged the muscle fibers in his forearms, but still he did not waver. Instead, he moved back down to the smaller branches, and slowly trained with those.

One day, after a particularly grueling training session, Indu found the man watching him from a distance. Without a word, the man approached and observed Indu's form and technique. After a few moments, he finally spoke. "You have the spirit, but your technique is

lacking. I initially declined to teach you because I knew I was a terrible teacher. But seeing your persistence, perhaps it's time I show you more directly."

Indu's heart raced with excitement as the man began to demonstrate the correct methods, albeit with a rough and impatient manner. The man's teaching style was harsh and unyielding, but Indu absorbed every detail, eager to improve. Over time, the stranger reluctantly guided Indu through the basics of activating resonant stones and utilizing the Rattle Parry Pyri.

"Resonant stones," the man explained gruffly, "are activated by focusing your inner vibrations and channeling them into the stone. It's about finding the right frequency within yourself." He handed Indu a small, dull stone and demonstrated the process. Indu watched intently as the stone began to glow faintly, resonating with the man's attunement.

Indu attempted to replicate the technique, initially struggling to find the right resonance. The man's patience was thin, but he offered gruff corrections and occasional demonstrations. Slowly but surely, Indu began to grasp the concept. The first time his resonant stone flickered to life, a sense of triumph surged through him.

Indu toiled on activating the resonant stone for a full week on his own. Each time trying different frequencies and intensities, further honing his attunement to vibration. When the man had finally come to check his progress, Indu, who believed that his progress was grim, had begun to shine the light so brightly that even at night the man saw shadows behind the trees and bushes.

"I'm not sure I've ever seen a stone shine so brightly," the man said in awe, slowly waltzing over to look at the stone directly. Surely he could not have given him a rare resonant stone with increased response to resonance, but to his surprise on activating the stone himself, the stone seemed to be a faint dim light in comparison. "I believe you're ready to move on to the next step," he muttered in intrigue of Indu's strange capacity for natural resonance.

Next, the man turned to the Rattle Parry Pyri. "This technique allows you to deflect attacks and disorient your opponent with a pulse of vibration," he explained. "It requires precise

control and timing.” He demonstrated by deflecting a heavy log with a pulse that sent it spinning away, followed by a wave of vibrations that unsettled the surrounding air.

Indu practiced diligently, his early attempts clumsy and ineffective. But the man’s relentless instruction, combined with Indu’s determination, gradually honed his skills. Each successful deflection, each pulse of vibration, brought him closer to mastering the Pyri.

The man’s teaching was far from perfect. His brusque manner and impatience often left Indu frustrated and bruised. But through this harsh mentorship, Indu learned resilience and precision. He grew more adept at activating resonant stones, and his Rattle Parry Pyri became increasingly effective.

One evening, as the sun dipped below the horizon, Indu successfully deflected a series of logs without faltering. The man nodded, a rare sign of approval. “You’ve come a long way,” he admitted begrudgingly. “There is still one left I can show you, and much else to learn, but you’ve proven yourself capable.”

That evening, the man sat with Indu to share a meal. Despite his harsh and temperamental demeanor, he had grown fond of the youth and wanted to give Indu a graduation gift of sorts. “You will become a fine man, young Indu,” he said, nodding while avoiding eye contact, as if nervous or embarrassed by his previous attitude toward Indu. “I want you to close your eyes and meditate for a moment,” the man instructed, and Indu obeyed.

“Listen to the world around you. Pay attention to the birds and the wind whistling through the trees,” the man continued. Indu followed his instructions. “Separate yourself from your body, and create a painting in your mind of the world you sit upon to visit these sounds you hear.” Indu expressed a face of discomfort. “You’ve seen art, yes?” the man asked, and Indu nodded. “Mortis the Artcraft painted one, which I believe is hung inside the Tree Communion gardens in town. He painted a kingdom with black and lines of blue. Paint this world in your mind with simplicity, and it will remain beautiful.”

Indu was overcome with an overwhelming sense of peace. “From where your body sits, vibrate all that touches the ground. Match with the resonance of the Earth, so that Miechtihi

may commune with you.” Indu envisioned a world inside his mind, with blue lines being the only defining details of the trees and bushes around him. He set his hands on the ground and pulsed a slow and gentle vibration through his body as well. Almost immediately, he felt as if his body began to levitate. Indu began to appear nervous, but the man rested his hand upon Indu’s shoulder. “You are in no danger. Be at peace within your mind, and visit the sounds you hear.”

Indu approached these sounds, still disoriented by the strange illusion of flying. He focused on what he envisioned as the source of the sounds and began to see the birds and frogs. The man asked, looking at the birds, “Can you tell me which bird is perched overhead?” Indu focused and responded, “I see a sparrow, perched above our heads.” The man smiled with humble pride. “You’ve grown, Indu. Perhaps I have a talent for teaching after all.” Indu opened his eyes and looked at him directly with reverence and gratitude. “Continue to hone your Spatial Awareness as I’ve taught you, and you’ll paint the world as it is while you walk. It may come to save your life someday.”

Indu bowed respectfully, grateful for the man's harsh but rewarding guidance. “Thank you,” he said sincerely. “I will continue to train and improve.”

The man simply nodded and turned away, disappearing into the shadows of the forest. Indu knew he might never see his mysterious mentor again, but the lessons learned were invaluable.

Through his father’s guidance, the stories of his mother, and the wisdom of both the elders and the influx of travelers, Indu’s character was shaped. He grew into a thoughtful and determined young man, driven by a desire to seek justice and knowledge. The foundation laid in Shikad would become the bedrock of his journey, as he set out to explore the mysteries of Igir and uncover the truths hidden in its ancient past.

As Indu grew older, his quest for knowledge and justice only deepened. On his twenty-second birthday, he received a rare opportunity that would further shape his destiny. Word had spread that the Prophet Kinil Hanatu, a renowned seer and sage, was passing through the southeastern region of Igir. Kinil Hanatu was known across the land for his profound

wisdom and the ability to foresee the threads of fate. He was a solitary figure, seldom seen and even less often consulted, his prophecies revered and feared in equal measure.

Indu's father, recognizing the significance of such an encounter, encouraged him to seek out the Prophet. "This may be the guidance you seek, my son," his father said, his eyes reflecting both hope and a touch of concern. Determined, Indu set out to meet Kinil Hanatu, traveling to a small, secluded clearing where the seer had made camp.

The Prophet's presence was commanding despite his humble surroundings. Draped in simple, earth-toned robes, Kinil Hanatu's piercing eyes seemed to hold the weight of countless lifetimes. As Indu approached, the seer regarded him with a knowing smile, as if he had been expecting him. "You seek knowledge, young Indu," Hanatu said, his voice resonant and calm, "but more importantly, you seek your path."

For several days, Indu stayed with the Prophet, absorbing his teachings and insights. Kinil Hanatu spoke of the ancient prophecies, the delicate balance of fate, and the responsibilities of those who pursued justice. He revealed to Indu that his journey was destined to intertwine with the fate of Khomaklu and the mysteries surrounding the cataclysm. "The past and the future are but two sides of the same coin," Hanatu explained, "and your role is to bring clarity to the shadows that linger in both."

The Prophet also spoke of the Moral Tablet, emphasizing its importance not just as a set of principles but as a living guide to navigating the complexities of life. "The virtues inscribed upon the Tablet are the keys to understanding and healing the world," he said. "Remember them, embody them, and you will find your way."

Before Indu departed, Kinil Hanatu gave him a parting gift—a small, intricately carved stone amulet. "This will guide you when the path seems uncertain," the Prophet said, placing the amulet in Indu's hand. "Trust in your virtues, and trust in yourself."

With newfound clarity and a renewed sense of purpose, Indu returned to Shikad. The encounter with Kinil Hanatu had not only deepened his understanding of his own destiny but had also solidified his commitment to uncovering the truths of Igir. As he looked towards

the future, Indu knew that his journey was just beginning, and that he was now more prepared than ever to face the challenges that lay ahead.

With the wisdom of the Prophet Kinil Hanatu fresh in his mind and the amulet securely around his neck, Indu felt an unwavering sense of purpose as he prepared to leave Shikad. The morning of his departure was filled with a mix of anticipation and melancholy. The villagers, having heard of his quest, gathered to bid him farewell. His father stood by his side, pride and a touch of sadness in his eyes. "Remember the virtues, Indu," he said, embracing his son one last time. "They will guide you when the path grows dark."

As Indu set off on the dusty road leading out of Shikad, he felt the weight of his mission and the thrill of the unknown. His journey took him through diverse landscapes, each more breathtaking and challenging than the last. The first few days were spent traversing rolling hills and dense forests, where the sounds of nature provided a constant, comforting background.

One of his earliest encounters was with a band of nomadic traders. They welcomed him into their camp, offering food and stories in exchange for news from Shikad. Around the crackling fire, Indu learned about the different regions of Igir, their customs, and the ongoing struggles of the people. The traders spoke of hidden relics in the ancient ruins obscured by the dense jungles to the south and whispered rumors of shadowy figures in the mountains to the north. These tales, though varied, all pointed to a world much larger and more complex than Indu had ever imagined. As he looked towards the horizon, Indu knew that the heart of his journey lay ahead, in the ancient ruins to the south, where the past and future would converge.

- Chapter 2 -

An Eerie Gentleman

The sun had barely risen when Indu set off southward, driven by tales of relics hiding in ancient ruins. His curiosity burned brightly, a beacon guiding him through the dense forests and over rolling hills of the eastern region. The path was rugged, overgrown with wild vines and the occasional twisted tree root, but Indu moved with determination, his thoughts consumed by the mysteries that awaited him.

As the day wore on, the forest began to thin, giving way to a landscape dotted with crumbling stone structures. The ruins loomed in the distance, their dark silhouettes stark against the blazing sunset. Indu paused, taking in the sight of what once might have been grand buildings, now reduced to remnants of a bygone era. The air was thick with an eerie silence, broken only by the rustle of leaves and the distant call of a night bird.

Just as he was about to continue, Indu sensed a presence behind him. The footsteps were so quiet that he only noticed because of his Spatial Awareness. He turned swiftly, his eyes narrowing as they fell upon a figure emerging from the shadows. The man moved with a ghostly grace, his steps barely making a sound on the forest floor.

The stranger wore a wooden mask, intricately carved and painted, unlike any Indu had seen before. It formed a face that seemed almost alive, the splinters shifting and moving as the man blinked and breathed. This mask was a symbol of importance, but its unique design set this man apart.

"Who are you?" Indu called out, his voice steady despite the unease creeping up his spine. The man did not respond, his silent gaze fixed on Indu. He studied the stranger's attire—a blend of dark fabrics and leather, practical yet enigmatic. The silence stretched between them, growing heavier with each passing moment.

"Are you from these ruins?" Indu tried again, but the man remained mute. His presence was unsettling, a silent specter in the fading light. Indu took a cautious step forward, hoping to bridge the distance, but the man mirrored his movement, keeping the gap unchanged.

Indu's questions hung in the air, unanswered. Despite the stranger's silence, there was something about him that piqued Indu's curiosity. The wooden mask, with its splintering movements, was both fascinating and disconcerting. Indu felt a chill run down his spine but forced himself to remain calm. He turned back to the path, deciding to continue his journey. The stranger, however, did not fall behind. He followed Indu, his steps eerily synchronized, like a shadow clinging to its source.

As the ruins drew closer, Indu could feel the weight of the man's silent presence behind him. Every now and then, he glanced back, only to see the masked figure maintaining the same distance, his eyes never wavering. Indu's discomfort grew, but his resolve to uncover the secrets of the ruins kept him moving forward.

Eventually, after what felt like hours, Indu looked back and found the stranger had vanished. The road behind him was empty, save for the whispering trees and the encroaching darkness. A sense of relief washed over him, but it was tinged with an unsettling curiosity. He thought, "Who was that man, and why had he followed me without a word?"

Shaking off the lingering unease, Indu pressed on towards the ruins. The encounter had only heightened his determination to uncover the mysteries that lay ahead. As he approached the

ancient structures, he felt a strange sense of anticipation, as if the shadows themselves were waiting to reveal their secrets.

As dusk settled into night, Indu approached the ruins, feeling a mix of anticipation and apprehension. The remnants of the once-grand structures loomed over him, their silhouettes sharp against the starry sky. The air grew colder, carrying a hint of something ancient and forgotten. He paused, activating the Resonant Stone hidden in his satchel. With a subtle hum, the stone began to glow, casting a soft, steady light that illuminated his path.

The ruins were a labyrinth of crumbling walls and overgrown pathways. Indu navigated the narrow passages, his senses heightened by the quiet stillness around him. The Spatial Awareness Pyri, a skill taught by his father, allowed him to perceive subtle vibrations in the ground. Every footfall, every rustle of leaves transmitted a faint echo, painting a detailed picture of his surroundings. He felt the lingering presence of long-departed souls, as if the stones themselves were whispering secrets of the past.

He moved cautiously, his steps careful and deliberate. The structures around him were intricate, even in their decay. Stone bricks, each etched with delicate patterns, interlocked seamlessly to form walls and arches that defied the passage of time. The ruins told a story of a civilization that had mastered the art of stonecraft, creating buildings that were both functional and beautiful.

Indu's light revealed carvings on the walls, depicting scenes of daily life in the ancient city. There were markets bustling with traders, scholars deep in discussion, and artisans crafting their wares. He paused to study one of the carvings closely, tracing the lines with his fingers. The detail was exquisite, capturing the vibrancy of a city that had once thrived with life.

As he ventured deeper into the ruins, the carvings took on a darker tone. Scenes of conflict and struggle emerged, hinting at a period of turmoil. Indu's curiosity grew, and he felt a compulsion to uncover the meaning behind these images. He knew that the ruins held the answers to many of his questions, and perhaps even the key to understanding the fall of west-central Igir.

Suddenly, Indu felt a faint vibration beneath his feet, distinct from the usual echoes of his surroundings. He stopped, focusing his Spatial Awareness to perceive the source. The vibrations were rhythmic, like the faint beat of a drum, coming from deeper within the ruins. He followed the trail, moving silently through the maze of stone.

The path led him to a partially collapsed building, its entrance obscured by vines and debris. Indu carefully cleared the way, his light revealing a narrow staircase descending into the darkness. He hesitated for a moment, then began his descent, the glow of the Resonant Stone guiding him.

The air grew colder as he descended, the vibrations becoming more pronounced. At the bottom of the staircase, he found himself in a large chamber. The walls were lined with shelves holding ancient scrolls and artifacts, covered in dust and cobwebs. In the center of the room stood a stone altar, its surface engraved with runes that glowed faintly in the light of the Resonant Stone.

Indu approached the altar, feeling the weight of centuries pressing down on him. The runes were unfamiliar, yet they seemed to pulse with a hidden energy. He reached out to touch them, feeling a subtle vibration under his fingertips. The sensation was unlike anything he had experienced before, a blend of ancient power and a message waiting to be deciphered.

As he stood there, lost in thought, the faint sound of footsteps echoed through the chamber. Indu turned, his heart racing, and saw the shadowy figure of the mysterious old man emerging from the darkness. The wooden mask with its splintering movements was unmistakable. Indu felt a chill run down his spine, but he steadied himself, determined to uncover the truth.

The Elder moved with the same eerie grace, his silent presence filling the room. Indu tried to speak, but the words caught in his throat. The masked man approached the altar, standing opposite Indu, his gaze locked on the runes. For a moment, they stood in silence, the tension thick in the air.

Finally, Indu found his voice. "What is this place?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper. The Elder remained silent, but his eyes seemed to convey a depth of knowledge and

understanding. Indu realized that words might not be the key to unlocking this encounter. Instead, he focused on the vibrations around him, trying to connect with the energy of the chamber.

To his surprise, the runes on the altar began to glow brighter, resonating with the vibrations he had activated. Indu felt a surge of understanding, as if the ancient symbols were speaking to him. The energy flowed through him, revealing glimpses of the past and the secrets held within the ruins.

The Elder watched silently, his mask shifting with each blink and breath. Indu sensed a connection between them, a shared purpose that transcended words. He knew that this encounter was just the beginning of a deeper journey, one that would take him into the heart of Igir's mysteries and the shadows that lingered within the ruins.

As the runes' glow began to fade, the Elder turned and walked away, disappearing into the darkness once more. Indu watched him go, feeling a mix of curiosity and determination. He knew that the path ahead was fraught with challenges, but he was ready to face them, armed with the knowledge and skills he had gained.

The ruins held many secrets, and Indu was resolved to uncover them all. With the Resonant Stone still glowing in his hand, he set off deeper into the labyrinth, ready to embrace whatever lay ahead.

With the Elder's silent departure, Indu continued deeper into the labyrinthine ruins, the light from his Resonant Stone casting eerie shadows on the ancient walls. The faint rhythmic vibrations underfoot grew stronger, guiding him towards the source. As he navigated the narrow corridors and crumbling archways, he began to hear the low, steady beat of drums.

The sound grew louder as he approached, resonating through the stone passages. These were not ordinary drums; they were large, Taiko-like instruments, their deep thrum echoing ominously in the confined space. Indu's heart pounded in sync with the rhythm, his curiosity and caution intertwining as he moved closer to the source.

Turning a corner, Indu came upon a wide chamber, dimly lit by flickering torches. The scene before him was both intriguing and horrifying. Tribesmen, their faces painted with crude markings, played the drums with a ritualistic fervor. Their movements were methodical, almost trance-like, as they struck the drumheads with quiet intensity. But it wasn't just their presence that caught Indu's attention; scattered around the chamber were the bodies of recently killed caravanners, hidden poorly behind piles of pilfered goods and supplies.

Indu's stomach churned at the sight. The caravanners had been ambushed and brutally slain, their remains a stark reminder of the ruthlessness lurking in the shadows of Igir. The tribesmen, oblivious to Indu's presence, continued their grim work, sifting through the stolen goods and consuming the food with a disturbing nonchalance.

Indu's mind raced, his training and the virtues of the Moral Tablet urging him to act. But before he could formulate a plan, a familiar presence made itself known. The Elder appeared silently behind him, his hand resting on Indu's shoulder. Indu jumped, startled by the unexpected touch, but calmed quickly upon recognizing the masked figure.

The Elder's gaze was fixed on the scene before them, his eyes conveying a stern resolve. He didn't speak, but a subtle nod from him was all Indu needed to understand. This was a moment for justice, a time to honor the lives of the fallen caravanners and to put an end to the tribesmen's brutality.

Indu took a deep breath, focusing his energy and activating his Spatial Awareness Pyri. The vibrations around him sharpened, giving him a clear perception of his surroundings and the movements of the tribesmen. He then prepared his Rattle Parry Pyri, ready to deflect any attacks and disorient his foes.

With the Elder by his side, Indu stepped into the chamber. The tribesmen, caught off guard by their sudden appearance, paused in their actions. Indu's voice rang out, steady and commanding, "This ends now. You will answer for the lives you've taken."

The tribesmen reacted with a mix of surprise and anger, some reaching for weapons while others hesitated. The air grew tense, the rhythmic drumming halting abruptly. Indu moved

swiftly, using rattle parry to deflect an incoming strike and send a pulse of vibration that disoriented his attacker. The tribesman stumbled, his weapon falling from his grasp.

The Elder, though silent, was a formidable presence. His movements were fluid and precise, his masked face an unchanging visage of determination. Together, they engaged the tribesmen, Indu using his Hamri and Pyri to fend off attacks while the Elder's silent Hamri prowess cut through the chaos with deadly efficiency.

The battle was intense but brief. The tribesmen, disoriented by Indu's Pyri and overwhelmed by the Elder's skill, quickly fell. As the dust settled, the chamber fell silent once more, the only sound the faint echo of the now-stilled drums.

Indu stood amidst the aftermath, his chest heaving with exertion. He glanced at the Elder, whose silent presence remained unwavering. Together, they surveyed the scene, ensuring that justice had been served for the slain caravanners.

With a sense of grim satisfaction, Indu turned to the Elder. "Thank you," he said quietly, his voice carrying the weight of their shared experience. The Elder gave a slight nod, his mask shifting subtly, and then, as silently as he had appeared, he began to walk away.

Indu watched him go, feeling a deep sense of respect and curiosity for the enigmatic figure. He knew that this encounter was only the beginning and that many more challenges lay ahead. But for now, he had honored the virtues of the Moral Tablet, bringing justice to those who had fallen.

As the night deepened, Indu gathered what he could from the ruins, taking a moment to pay his respects to the fallen caravanners. The journey was far from over, and the mysteries of the eastern region awaited him. With a renewed sense of purpose, he set off once more into the darkness, the light of his Resonant Stone guiding his way.

Deeper yet in the labyrinthine ruins, Indu found himself in a more secluded chamber, where the air was thick with the scent of incense and the flickering light of torches cast eerie shadows on the walls. The rhythmic drumming had ceased, replaced by a low, chanting murmur. As

Indu approached cautiously, he discovered another group of tribesmen. These three appeared far more seasoned than the previous ones, their presence commanding an air of reverence and authority.

The trio sat cross-legged on the ground, surrounding what appeared to be a sacred relic. The object, resting on a stone pedestal, was intricately carved and adorned with symbols Indu did not recognize. The tribesmen's eyes were closed, their hands raised in worship, deep in their ritualistic chants.

Indu turned to see if the Elder was there, but the masked figure was nowhere to be found. Respecting the unfamiliar faith, Indu did not abruptly interrupt their worship. Instead, he walked through the doorway, deliberately making noise to announce his presence. The chanting ceased, and the three tribesmen opened their eyes, turning their gazes towards him.

"I have come seeking answers," Indu declared, his voice echoing in the chamber. "Your men have murdered caravanners and stolen their goods. What is your role in these atrocities?"

The chieftain, distinguished by a more elaborate headdress, rose to his feet with a mocking smile. "It was us," he said, his tone dripping with taunt. "We took what we needed, and disposed of those who stood in our way."

Indu's eyes hardened. "Then there is honor to be had here," he responded, his voice resolute. The air grew tense as the chieftain signaled to his two commanders, and they stood in unison, ready to fight.

The battle began with a flurry of movement. The tribesmen fought with a martial stance unfamiliar to Indu, relying solely on their fists and legs. Their attacks were swift and precise, each strike aimed to incapacitate. Indu found himself on the defensive, struggling to keep up with the relentless onslaught. He parried a punch with his Rattle Parry Pyri, sending a pulse of vibration to disorient his attacker, but the tribesman quickly regained his composure.

The chieftain and his commanders moved with a fluidity that spoke of years of training and discipline. They attacked in harmony, their movements synchronized as if they were one

entity. Indu was pushed to his limits, each blow he received sapping his strength. He ducked under a kick, delivering a swift counterpunch, but the tribesman deflected it with ease. The fight was a dance of aggression and defense, each side testing the other's resolve.

Indu's Spatial Awareness Pyri heightened his senses, allowing him to anticipate some of their moves, but the tribesmen were relentless. He took a hard punch to the ribs, the pain sharp and immediate. Gritting his teeth, he focused on staying upright, his training in martial arts guiding his movements. He landed a solid hit on one of the commanders, sending him staggering back, but the other two were quick to close the gap.

The chieftain launched a powerful kick, which Indu barely managed to block, the force sending him stumbling backwards. Regaining his balance, Indu activated his Rattle Parry once more, creating a brief opening. He lunged forward, using the opportunity to land a series of strikes on the chieftain. The seasoned tribesman grunted in pain but remained standing, his eyes burning with defiance.

The commanders, seeing their leader under attack, redoubled their efforts. Indu fought valiantly, his movements a blend of defensive parries and offensive strikes. The chamber echoed with the sounds of their clash, each blow resonating through the ancient stone walls. Despite his best efforts, Indu was taking more hits than he could afford. He felt his strength waning, the relentless barrage pushing him to the edge.

Drawing on the last reserves of his energy, Indu focused on the virtues that had guided him thus far. He summoned his inner strength, delivering a decisive strike to one commander's solar plexus, knocking the wind out of him. Seizing the moment, he turned to the second commander, deflecting a punch with his Rattle Parry and countering with a swift kick that sent the tribesman sprawling.

Now, only the chieftain remained. The two circled each other, their breathing heavy, eyes locked in a silent challenge. The chieftain launched a final, desperate attack, but Indu, fueled by determination and the principles of the Moral Tablet, countered with a powerful series of strikes that overwhelmed his opponent. With a final blow, the chieftain fell to the ground, defeated.

Panting heavily, Indu stood over his fallen adversaries, the pain of his injuries a testament to the battle's intensity. He turned, expecting to see the Elder watching from the shadows. Indeed, the masked figure stood at the entrance of the chamber, his presence as silent and enigmatic as ever.

Indu searched the Elder's eyes, hoping to find a glimmer of pride or approval. But instead, he was met with a look of disappointment. The Elder's gaze seemed to pierce through him, silently judging his every move. Indu's heart sank, realizing that despite his victory, there was much he still had to learn.

The Elder turned and disappeared into the darkness, leaving Indu alone with his thoughts. The fight had been won, but the path to true justice and understanding was still long and fraught with challenges. Indu knew that he had to dig deeper, not only into the mysteries of the ruins but also into the depths of his own soul.

Determined to prove himself and to honor the virtues that had guided him, Indu gathered his strength and prepared to continue his journey. The ruins still held many secrets, and he was resolved to uncover them all, no matter the cost.

With the seasoned tribesmen defeated and the silence of the ruins settling around him, Indu took a moment to catch his breath. The pain from his injuries was a constant reminder of the battle's intensity, but his resolve remained unbroken. As he ventured deeper into the labyrinth, he encountered no more tribesmen, the eerie quiet of the ruins pressing in on him.

In a small, dust-laden alcove, Indu's eyes caught sight of a delicate scroll, half-buried under rubble. Gently, he retrieved it, brushing off the centuries-old dust. The scroll was old and fragile, its surface etched with a series of poems. Though tempted to read them, Indu felt that this was not the time. His eyes moved to the bottom of the scroll, where a name was signed in elegant script: "Dekeshik Amidnir." The name was unfamiliar, and Indu wondered about its significance.

As he made his way out of the ruins, the first light of dawn began to creep over the horizon, casting the landscape in a dark red hue. The sunrise felt like an omen, a somber reminder that

blood had been spilt that night. Indu pressed on, the quiet roads ahead promising new challenges and discoveries.

Suddenly, he sensed a presence behind him, a subtle vibration alerting him to another's approach. Swiftly turning around, he saw the Elder once more, his back turned, walking away with the old dusty scroll in hand. "Wait!" Indu blurted out impulsively. The Elder paused but did not turn.

Indu hurried to catch up, a mix of determination and apprehension driving him. "I need to understand your expression of disappointment," Indu said, his voice carrying a note of urgency.

The Elder turned slowly, his mask still and unreadable. "You are too violent!" he barked sternly. "No man should seek justice whilst his mind is twisted with hate!"

The words struck Indu deeply, and he responded with a solemn look, only now beginning to comprehend the true nature of his feelings towards those who opposed the Moral Tablet. The realization was sobering, and he felt a heavy weight settle on his shoulders.

As the Elder turned to walk away, Indu called out again, this time more nervously. "Can you help me?" he asked, his voice tinged with a plea.

The Elder paused once more, his silent presence commanding respect. "Sit with me," he said humbly, yet with a tone of reverence that demanded attention.

Indu followed the Elder to a nearby fallen stone pillar, where the elder seated himself with the scroll still in hand. As they sat in the growing light of dawn, the Elder began to speak, his voice measured and calm.

"The village where I was born lay deep in the woods of Iliaus," the Elder started, his eyes gazing into the distance as if he could see the past unfold before him. "It was a quiet place, where the beauty of the untamed wilds rested deep in the hearts of every inhabitant. On clear mornings, you could look out and see the vast expanse of nature, a sight that filled our hearts with peace and wonder."

Indu listened intently, feeling the weight of the Elder's words. The elder's voice carried a melody of nostalgia and sorrow, painting vivid pictures of a world long gone.

"When I was young," the Elder continued, "I loved the ceremonies we held. The way our clothes danced alongside us, vibrant colors swaying on fabric lit by the bonfires. The air was filled with the enchanting sounds of flutes, pipes, drums, and strings, melodies passed down through generations. But one night, our joy was shattered."

The Elder's expression grew darker as he recounted the harrowing tale. "It was late, and we were celebrating a new dancer from a neighboring region. Unbeknownst to us, the Bakodun warlords had planned a supply raid. They struck without warning, taking the lives of my fellow people."

Indu could see the pain in the Elder's eyes, the memories of that night etched deeply into his soul. "With nothing but rage in my heart, I danced a different dance—a dance of fists and kicks, of swirls and jumps... of blood and violence. When the beautiful sun rose, and the first cold breeze of the morning rattled the wind chimes, I was the only remaining survivor of the Amunairi people."

The Elder's voice wavered as he described the aftermath. "A lake of blood gleamed around the ceremonial circle. The bodies of the raiders lay strewn about as if mauled by wild beasts, their faces full of fright and pain. They were young men and women, forced by their lords to fight a war they did not believe in. And there, among them, were my brothers and sisters, still adorned in the garb of celebration, now motionless and silent. This was the end of my people."

Indu felt a deep sorrow for the Elder and a newfound understanding of the elder's disappointment in him. The tale of the Amunairi people was a powerful reminder of the destructive potential of rage and violence.

The Elder sighed deeply, the weight of his past evident in his posture. "By the expression on your face, you must now see my reasoning for my feelings. It is here that I'll take my leave."

As the Elder stood and began to walk away again, Indu felt a surge of urgency. He stopped the elder once more with a request, stuttering nervously as he asked, "C-can you teach me? Sir... elder, or whatever I may call you. B-but can you teach me? To dance, as... as elegantly as your people's pride?"

The elder paused, standing there a moment before quietly responding, "Dekeshik," he said. "You may call me Dekeshik."

Indu bowed humbly, offering his name in return. "Indu," he said.

Dekeshik looked at him with a thoughtful expression. "I can help you, but you must abandon your hate."

The silence that followed was profound. Indu pondered in fright. He couldn't imagine upholding his virtues without something to hate; what may come of his purpose if he abandons the duty he chose? "How could you forgive? The Bakodun *raided* your camp and *murdered* your friends and neighbors," Indu stated.

"Because the murderers of my people have died," Dekeshik replied boldly. The statement left Indu in confused awe. "It is because **I** was the one who paid them justice. Justice, being that it was done to protect the people whom they sought to ruin next."

Indu sat, directing his full focus to Dekeshik.

"When a man kills his brethren out of hate, it is not justice. When a man kills his brethren out of envy, it is not justice. Justice is killing his brethren to protect his family. It is not pleasant, It is not pride. It is to be treated with care, And mourned with cries. Do not mistake, Do not justify, Act only in justice, Where only it is implied."

Indu then recalled the name written on the scroll and asked Dekeshik why his name was signed there. "My name is there because it was I who wrote it," he said, now with an uplifting manner. "I witnessed the fall of the 4 kingdoms by the effects of the Cataclysm." Dekeshik sat down beside him and began to read the scroll aloud, his voice carrying the weight of the ancient verses.

"Le' Anu, its parapets despaired: Ye who was great and mighty; When the earth split open with teeth bared; Fallen, into the mouth of Ash and Stone."

The scroll spoke of the fall of Attal, a once-prosperous port town. Dekeshik's voice continued, each word resonating with the weight of history and the lessons it held.

"Port town of trade and wares, Whose prize was oil, Attal stood a Pillar there. Ye who was wealth and pride, Now drowned under the water, Whom they'd tamed to ride."

Dekeshik went on to describe the history of Khomaklu. Although Indu had already learned of these histories, hearing them spoken by his newfound companion was an entirely new experience. It filled him with a strong desire to uphold morality once more, feeling the depth of Dekeshik's wisdom and the weight of the past.

"Long ago, in the beginning of Igirian culture, there was a man named Niroklo. He was the first man of Igir to organize civilization upon these lands, and he did so by imposing a set of rules to govern his people. He called these rules 'The Moral Tablet'. Writ upon this tablet were 32 virtues: 16 Higher Virtues, and 16 Lower Virtues. Niroklo was near obsessively passionate about nature and was often found spending time with the sparrows who came to his window each morning for seed. It was here he learned of the 32 feathers total upon their wings that offered his beautiful companions flight upon the skies and clouds he came to adore ever so lovingly. These 'feathers', as he called them, were as follows:"

"On the first wing, the Higher Virtues:

1. Sight
2. Breath
3. Health
4. Compassion
5. Inquisition/Knowledge
6. Humility
7. Honor

8. Unity
9. Meditation
10. Vigilance
11. Honesty
12. Truth
13. Ambition
14. Integrity
15. Regret
16. Endurance"

"And on the second, the Lower Virtues:

17. Gratitude
18. Life & Death
19. Foresight
20. Pause
21. Moderation
22. Justice
23. Release
24. Courage
25. Action
26. Resolve
27. Cleanliness
28. Benevolence
29. Duty
30. Authenticity
31. Generosity
32. Love"

"He believed that each of these virtues were of equal importance, and each was the highest of Law. Though, a great man once told him, 'The highest virtue is not virtue, and therefore,

really is virtue. But lower virtue cannot let go of being virtue; therefore, it is not virtue, but rather a duty to be carried. In other words, when you breathe, you don't congratulate yourself on being virtuous, but breathing is a great virtue... It's living. When you come out with beautiful eyes, blue, brown, or green—whatever the case may be—you don't congratulate yourself for having grown one of the most fabulous jewels on Earth. 'They're just eyes,' you say. And you don't account it a virtue... To see? To entertain the miracles of color and form...? But that's real virtue!"

"It was Niroklo's dream to attain peace amongst his people, and it worked quite well in his favor; that is, until he passed the torch to his successor, and he to his. One by one, each of them began to allow the law to slip beneath them, and fell victim to the very crimes Niroklo's Moral Tablet was written to prevent. It was this chain of events and generations that led to the cataclysm, which was said to be wrought upon our continent by one man... but, of course, such are merely the legends. No catastrophe such as the one that brings our world to its current state could have been caused by only one man."

Indu listened, captivated by the story. The depth of history and the weight of the virtues resonated deeply within him. The idea that a single man could bring about such change, for better or worse, was both inspiring and daunting.

- Chapter 3 -

Unified Purpose

Indu and Dekeshik stood at the edge of the ancient ruins, the morning light casting long shadows behind them. The events of the previous night weighed heavily on Indu's mind, and he knew that their journey was far from over. Dekeshik, with his silent presence and deep

wisdom, had become an essential part of Indu's quest. As they prepared to leave, Indu wondered what their next destination would be.

"We should head north," Dekeshik said, breaking the silence. His voice was steady, each word carefully chosen. The northern mountains were known for their treacherous paths and mysterious occurrences. The journey would be long and arduous, but Indu felt a surge of anticipation mixed with confusion. He was given the purpose of repairing Igir beyond the cataclysm, but to be fair, was never given direction. For now, wandering aimlessly seems to be the best way to gather knowledge.

"So, wait. Why do you travel with me? Also, for what reason did you come to me in general?" Indu asked, chuckling lightly. Dekeshik looked into his eyes, stared for a moment, shrugged, and walked away. Indu, flabbergasted, called after him, "Is that your response then? You're just going to ignore me?"

Dekeshik turned, gave him a slight grin, and continued to walk north. Indu stared at the man, lost in thought, until the silence was broken by a sarcastic remark from Dekeshik, "If you're not coming, Mr. '*Chosen One*,' then you might want to at least pack to head back home."

"Chosen one? For what?" Indu replied, now more confused than ever.

"Hanatu had been searching for nine years, and recently I heard the rumors of the young boy whom he chose to set everything right," Dekeshik stated. "It piqued my curiosity, and I wanted to see you for myself. Were you not aware of this?" he asked, looking at Indu with concern and confusion.

"I was told to '*bring clarity to the shadows*,' which I assumed meant that I was to learn the cause of the cataclysm," Indu said calmly.

Dekeshik shrugged and made a face, "Well, that's part of it, sure."

Indu and Dekeshik stared at each other for some time until Indu bluntly asked, "Are you not going to tell me the rest?" looking at Dekeshik with irritation.

Dekeshik looked at him for a moment and said, "*Nope!*" and turned to walk away again.

Indu grumbled to himself, "Nice. You're *so* helpful," he said sarcastically under his breath.

"*Thanks*," Dekeshik replied, reciprocally sarcastic. Indu simply looked up, confused that Dekeshik was able to hear him, and then looked back down, grumbling as he followed Dekeshik on the road.

The northern path was fraught with challenges, the landscape becoming increasingly rugged and wild. The air grew colder, the terrain more treacherous. Indu felt the strain of the journey, but the presence of Dekeshik was both a comfort and a mystery. They traveled in silence for the most part, the rhythm of their footsteps a steady beat against the untamed land.

As they climbed higher into the mountains, Indu couldn't help but reflect on the elder's words. The concept of abandoning hate was foreign to him, yet he could see the wisdom in it. He had always believed that his rage fueled his sense of justice, but Dekeshik's teachings suggested otherwise. Indu knew he had much to learn, not just about the world, but about himself.

One evening, as they set up camp, Indu decided to broach the subject again. "Dekeshik," he began cautiously, "you said Hanatu chose me to set things right. What did he mean by that?"

Dekeshik, tending to the fire, glanced up briefly. "Hanatu believes you have the potential to restore balance to Igir, to heal the wounds left by the cataclysm. But it's not just about uncovering the past. It's about forging a future based on the virtues of the Moral Tablet."

Indu absorbed this in silence, feeling the weight of responsibility. "And you? Why do you follow me?"

Dekeshik's eyes met Indu's, his gaze piercing. "I seek justice as you do, but I also seek redemption. My past is filled with actions that haunt me. By guiding you, I hope to find my own path to peace. Not to mention, you had also asked for my guidance."

Indu nodded, understanding the unspoken bond forming between them. "I promise to learn, to do better," he said earnestly.

Dekeshik gave a slight nod. "That is all I ask."

The following days were grueling, the path steep and unforgiving. Yet, with each step, Indu felt himself growing stronger, not just physically, but in his resolve. He practiced the teachings of Dekeshik, focusing on his attunements and martial skills, but always with a mind towards the virtues he sought to embody.

The pair pressed on for 6 days' time, until the mountains loomed in the distance, their peaks shrouded in mist. The path ahead was rugged and wild, winding through dense forests and over steep ridges. As they traveled, the landscape changed gradually from the gentle rolling hills of Shikad to the more imposing terrain of the eastern regions. The air grew cooler, and the scent of pine and earth filled their lungs.

As they neared the mountain range at nightfall, a new mystery awaited them. In the distance, they saw the flicker of torches and heard the faint sound of voices carried on the wind. Another group of travelers, or perhaps a threat? Indu and Dekeshik exchanged a glance, both understanding that whatever lay ahead, they would face it together.

During their approach, both Indu and Dekeshik were sure to activate their Awareness Pyri, in the event of an ambush. They ascended the path slowly, until noticing what lay ahead was in fact a caravan. A small band of people that sat with their carts of goods alongside the edge of the road.

They approached the caravan cautiously, and called out, "Jallei!", a friendly greeting amongst the Igirian people. The caravanners responded hesitantly, since after all, it was two strangers approaching from the blackness of night. Indu approached slowly into the light, and asked, "are you from the north?"

The head of the caravan responded, "Yes, we've come from Ryamur through the mountains."

Indu studied the people around the fire for a moment before asking his next question, “We’ve been hearing strange rumors about the mountains that lay ahead, are you aware of them?”

The head of the caravan and his followers glanced amongst each other with a slight unease. “There were in fact strange rumors involving those mountains, and I could see why,” he stated. “I wouldn’t pass through there at night if you were wise, some caravans have disappeared recently along Igur’s pass. Even from the ‘safer’ route we took around it, we could hear what sounded like humming from the trees, from far away. Much farther than what a human voice can carry.”

“Did you happen to see the rumored ‘shadow figures’?” Indu asked calmly. “We are headed to investigate them, any information you could share would be of benefit.”

The head of the caravan looks at Indu with confusion and concern, and replies “Well, you’re far braver than I, kid. I’ve never seen them myself, but I’m told they don’t apply to the same laws as we humans. Some have even been said to shapeshift into Krom.”

The Krom were a magnificent quadrupedal mammal with a long thin neck, and long winding horns like that of a bramble bush which could seed flowers and plants of all kinds. Indu had never seen one in person, but after seeing a painting of one in the Tree Communion gardens, he had always dreamed what they would be like in person.

The head of the caravan looked around Indu a few times before asking, “Are you really so confident to be traveling alone at night?”

Indu tilted his head and squinted his eyes in confusion, “Alone? My companion is right—” Indu noticed Dekeshik had disappeared again, “—here...?” He said, looking around with sudden concern.

The head of the caravan looked at Indu in confusion until noticing a man suddenly appear sitting on the ground next to the fire, with his hand raised to signal his presence. “Umai!” he exclaimed in fright, startling the others around him.

Dekeshik looked around, embarrassed, and Indu, with a sigh of relief and slight irritation, explained, “This is my travel compan—”

“Advisor,” Dekeshik interrupted.

With another sigh, Indu continued, “—my Advisor, Dekeshik. Please don't mind him, he's unusually quiet. Not even *I* hear him speak very often.”

The caravanners glanced at one another in slight relief and took their seats once more, wary of Dekeshik's awkward presence but no longer scared by him.

“How *do* you do that?” Indu asked with fascination. “You've disappeared like this many times, but never once have you shown your technique,” he stated.

Dekeshik didn't even so much as look up from the fire as he ate his cooked meat.

“—also when did you hunt? Did you catch that just now while I was speaking to the caravan?” Indu asked.

At this point, everyone around the fire turned their focus to Dekeshik, as he nervously glanced upward, catching everyone's eyes.

“Mm.” He hummed with a slight nod, his eyes closed.

Indu suddenly realized that Dekeshik had simply been disappearing all this time because he was nervous. It was an “image” he intended to uphold, but his mystery was becoming clearer to Indu, that not only was he nervous but he was simply an awkward, shy fellow. And as humble as he was kind. Indu shook his head to refocus and sat down beside Dekeshik.

The pair rested with the party that evening, sharing stories of life in other regions. Two of the members of the caravan were from the Khasaldan deserts in the far north, telling tales of Wooden Rippleworms, which were a form of insect that grew very large, adorned with wood-like bodies that vibrated to travel quickly under the sand. “Most are too small and often

flee from people, but once reaching a certain size, they can be perilous to encounter,” one of them described.

Indu listened to each of the members' stories with glee, eager to learn more about the world that was far larger than he could comprehend. In his whole life, he had never gone further than Iburil with his father, and that was only once to visit the fishermen for fresh fish and lobster.

As the conversations continued, Dekeshik remained mostly silent, occasionally nodding or offering a brief hum of agreement. His presence was a steadying force, and Indu noticed that the caravanners, while wary at first, had grown more comfortable with Dekeshik's quiet demeanor.

Eventually, the head of the caravan, a middle-aged man with a thick beard and a commanding presence, leaned forward. "We've shared our stories, but what about you two? What brings you to these parts?"

Indu glanced at Dekeshik before answering. "We're on a journey to uncover the truth behind the cataclysm and to restore balance to Igir, though... I've never gone beyond the confines of Shikad until recently."

The head of the caravan nodded thoughtfully. "A noble quest, but... Be careful. These lands hold many secrets, and not all of them are kind to those who seek them."

"Do you know anything that may help guide me toward the answers I seek?" Indu asked inquisitively.

The head of the caravan thought for a moment before shaking his head, "mm, no. I'm sorry, I do not. Much of the cataclysm is shrouded in mystery, as if it was an event the people unanimously agreed would be better if it were forgotten."

Indu looked to Dekeshik, and downward into the fire overcome with a sense of defeat.

The man continued, "It might be a large risk, but I am aware of certain tribes and towns toward the western coast who claim to have found '*a new Messiah*' of sorts, preaching that the cataclysm was '*the Great Reset*', or something like that. I don't imagine them being a welcoming bunch, however, so you may not get many answers by speaking to them."

"Thank you," Indu said with a slight bow, "even as little information as that might seem, you've given me a direction to investigate."

As the fire burned low, they settled in for the night, grateful for the warmth and camaraderie. The next morning, the caravan prepared to move on, and so did Indu and Dekeshik. They bid farewell to their new acquaintances, exchanging wishes for safe travels. The head of the caravan offered a final piece of advice. "If you're heading into Igur's Pass, keep an eye on the trees. They say the shadows bend with the forest, making it hard to tell where one ends and the other begins."

With those words echoing in their minds, Indu and Dekeshik set off once more, their path leading them further into the unknown. The mountains loomed ahead, their peaks shrouded in mist. The journey would be challenging, but Indu felt a renewed sense of purpose, bolstered by the stories and the knowledge they had gained.

Not long after the two had gone their separate way from the caravan, Indu was bothered by Dekeshik's insistent silence. "You know, Dekeshik. I hope you aren't uncomfortable in my presence," he said somberly. "I do wish that you would speak to me more often. I find your wisdom fascinating," he continued, turning around behind him to see that Dekeshik had disappeared once more. Indu stopped, searching behind him with a hint of sadness, and then turned back to continue forward.

Suddenly, he bumped into Dekeshik, who was standing directly in front of him with something in hand. "This is my Dümnařín," he said with a slight undertone of excitement and pride.

Indu looked at him for a moment in surprise at his sudden appearance, but smiled gently at Dekeshik and asked, "What does it do?"

Dekeshik showed it to him before explaining. It was a uniquely shaped stringed instrument, with horns wrapping in and around each other at the top and bottom, while the neck that ran between them was that of a flexible vine. There were two handles on the back of the top and bottom, which allowed him to bend the instrument slightly forward and backward, creating a unique drifting tone while the strings vibrated.

Dekeshik looked up, his eyes meeting Indu's. "This is a catalyst for a unique vibration attunement," he explained. "It allows me to cross over into the Alter-Dimension."

Indu's eyes widened in fascination. "The Alter-Dimension?"

Dekeshik nodded. "It is a realm parallel to our own, where time and space behave differently. By using this instrument, I can create a resonance that opens a gateway to this dimension. It is a powerful technique, but it must be used with great care."

Indu watched as Dekeshik demonstrated. Holding the instrument, Dekeshik struck a series of precise notes, the vibrations creating a shimmering portal in the air before them. The portal glowed with an otherworldly light, casting an ethereal glow over the campsite. With a focused expression, Dekeshik stepped into the portal, disappearing from sight. Moments later, he reappeared, as if emerging from thin air.

"The Alter-Dimension can be a place of refuge or a means of quick travel," Dekeshik explained. "But it is also dangerous. One must be attuned to its precise series of vibrations to navigate it safely. Anything placed into the dimension will also be ejected when the technique is released, making it a temporary storage space as well."

Indu was amazed. "Can you teach me this technique?"

Dekeshik shook his head, his expression serious. "It is not something one can learn quickly. It requires years of training and a deep understanding of vibration attunement. For now, focus on mastering the basics. In time, you may be ready to learn more advanced techniques."

As they continued their journey, Indu practiced his attunement diligently, with Dekeshik's guidance. The path to the mountains became increasingly challenging, with steep inclines and rough stone terrain that tested their endurance and resolve. The air grew thinner, and the temperature dropped, the chill biting at their skin.

- Chapter 4 -

The Singing Woods

They approached the ancient woodlands of Igur's Pass, one of the many Elderwoods scattered across Igir. Towering Elder trees reached for the sky, their branches interwoven like the fingers of giants. Elderwoods were considered sacred ground, a tradition passed down for generations even before the advent of Niroklo's vision for Igir. The forest floor was carpeted with moss and fallen leaves, creating a soft, muffled silence broken only by the distant call of birds. Sunlight filtered through the canopy, casting dappled patterns of light and shadow that danced as the wind stirred the leaves.

Suddenly, almost in unison, the pair stopped in their tracks. Their Awareness Pyri had picked up a gentle pulse beneath their feet, followed by a distant hum that was barely audible. Unphased, Dekeshik pressed on with caution, and Indu followed in tow. With the soft moss carpet on the forest floor, their approach was quiet, eliminating the need to tread silently with another Pyri. Using two Pyri simultaneously becomes exhausting quickly, best to avoid it whenever possible.

Indu listened intently, absorbing both the sound of the birds and the humming, which grew ever more harmonic as it pulsed from the distance.

“Stay vigilant, Indu. We still don’t know what we face ahead,” Dekeshik’s voice was a steady anchor, grounding him amidst the curious hum.

“It is slightly beautiful, though... is it not?” Indu pointed out optimistically.

Dekeshik did not respond; instead, his face began to display signs of concern, with a hint of fear. Indu had never seen Dekeshik make such a glare before. “I should probably focus in, too,” Indu thought to himself.

As they walked, the forest gave way to rocky terrain, the path becoming steeper and more treacherous. The mountains rose before them, their peaks hidden in swirling mists and under the canopy of the Elderwoods. The sound of rushing water echoed through the valleys, ominously mixing with the rhythms of the hums, which grew ever closer.

Dekeshik spoke again. “Indu, do you know why I wear this mask?”

Indu shook his head. “No, but I’ve always wondered.”

Dekeshik paused, his hand gently tracing the edges of the mask. “This mask is a symbol of my past, of the responsibilities I carry and the mistakes I’ve made. It is a reminder that I am bound by my duty to uphold the virtues of the Moral Tablet.”

Indu looked at him with a mixture of respect and curiosity. “Where did it come from?”

Dekeshik's face suddenly bore an expression of shame. "It does not belong to me," he muttered solemnly. "This is the mask of the Bakodun Warlord responsible for the raid that murdered my people."

Indu looked downward as they slowly marched toward the hum. "Will you ever take it off?"

Dekeshik's gaze turned distant. "Perhaps, one day, when I have fully redeemed myself. Until then, it serves as a constant reminder of the path I must walk."

Their journey continued, the rugged beauty of the mountains providing a stunning backdrop to their conversations and reflections. The higher they climbed, the more breathtaking the views became, while the mysterious hum grew ever closer, even beginning to resonate inside their chests as the hums and vibrations pulsed.

"Stop," Dekeshik muttered.

Indu directed his full focus to his surroundings. The silence was deafening. They were too distracted by conversation to have noticed that the birds had gone silent, and although the rushing waters through the valley were still nearby, they too were silent. His heart beat in his ears, like the drums echoing through the ruins of the other night.

Indu looked to the canopy, studying the branches carefully for an ambush. The melodic humming and pulses began once more, much stronger than before. The ground beneath his feet pulsed so violently, the moss would blur slightly with movement, and his head so much so that his eyes began to blur as well. He could only see clearly between pulses, which he would use to continue to study his surroundings. He looked to Dekeshik, whose mask reflected his face beneath it, revealing that his eyes were closed.

Dekeshik had focused so deeply into his Spatial Awareness, that he was painting a picture of his surroundings with precise clarity, even through the violent vibrational pulses.

Indu, while frantically searching the undergrowth ahead, quietly but urgently inquired Dekeshik for his opinion, "Is it wise to continue on? We must leave, Deke—"

“We are not alone. Prepare yours–” Dekeshik was abruptly interrupted by a man cloaked in pitch black fabric, who burst from the bushes to his left with a precise kick to the side of his face.

Indu, in his panic, leaped backwards and took his stance to defend himself and Dekeshik, but was unaware that there was more than only one opponent. A second man sprinted toward him from his right, and attempted to tackle Indu.

Instinctively, Indu sidestepped, using his Rattle Parry attunement to send a shockwave that threw the assailant off balance. The man stumbled but quickly regained his footing, his movements fluid and practiced. Indu barely had time to assess the situation before a third figure emerged from the shadows, his approach silent and lethal.

The fight was a blur of motion. Indu and Dekeshik were outnumbered and outmaneuvered. Indu blocked a punch aimed at his ribs, countering with a swift kick that sent his attacker reeling. But before he could catch his breath, another blow came from behind, striking his shoulder and sending him to the ground.

Just as suddenly as it happened, an unknown savior leaped in to aid Indu and Dekeshik. For but a moment, Indu begged the question in his mind, “*not three, but **four**?? Neither he nor I were able to sense **four presences**??*” He shook his head and focused forward to the opponent who assailed Dekeshik, who stood over his body with a menacing glare.

Dekeshik, disoriented but determined, swept his leg out, tripping the assailant. The man fell to the ground, and Dekeshik was on him in an instant, using precise strikes to subdue him. Indu, meanwhile, faced off against the third attacker, whose movements were swift and unpredictable.

The savior, wearing a leather garb and a blue veshti like the teal waters of the Yumi Lake, moved with unparalleled skill, deflecting blows and countering with a grace that seemed almost supernatural. His presence was a whirlwind of motion, a blur that confused and overwhelmed the attackers.

Indu felt a surge of hope, his confidence bolstered by the mysterious ally. He landed a solid punch to his opponent's jaw, the force sending the man sprawling. But just as he turned to assist Dekeshik, a piercing voice cut through the chaos.

"Stop!" Another cloaked figure wearing a porcelain mask with gold and blue markings stepped forward, their tone authoritative. The combatants froze, the air thick with tension.

The masked figure surveyed the scene, their gaze settling on Dekeshik's mask. "What is the meaning of this?" they demanded, their voice calm but commanding.

The attackers, panting and battered, exchanged uneasy glances. One of them stepped forward, pointing at Dekeshik. "He wears the mask of a Bakodun Warlord. We thought he was a scout, here to spy on us."

Dekeshik, still catching his breath, slowly put his hands on the edges of his mask, "I am no Bakodun scout," he said, his voice steady. "My name is Dekeshik Amidnir. This mask is a reminder of the past, of the consequences of hatred and violence."

The masked figure nodded slowly, lowering their weapon. "A misunderstanding, then. We are the shadows of Igur's Pass. It seems you were directed here by the rumors circulating around us."

Indu, still wary, glanced at Dekeshik and then at their savior. "Who are you?"

He was a young man, with a stern face but kind expression. "I am Imei. I hail from the Northeastern coast, beyond the mountains north of Ryamur. My village is named Taili."

The man with the porcelain mask stepped forward, and removed it, revealing a weathered but kind face. "I am Lorian. We are not as we've been described. We are the Ao'li (ow-lee), a humble tribe, seeking the so-called *Messiah*, so that we may bring him to his knees for what he has done to our home."

Relief washed over Indu, yet in his mind, he reluctantly thought, “*five, presences...*” He looked at Dekeshik, who gave a slight nod of approval. “Perhaps we can assist each other, then,” Indu said. “You may call me Indu. My Advisor and I are also in search of the man called the Messiah.”

With the misunderstanding resolved, the group gathered their bearings. The pulsing vibrations in the air ceased, as it was a Pyri created by the cloaked figures, while the melodic humming continued off in the distance.

“Follow me,” said Lorian, “I’ll take you to our camp.”

Lorian guided the group deeper into Igur’s Pass. They followed the mountain road upward until they reached a fingerpost for caravans, which pointed to various towns and villages, along with their distances. They then veered off the road into the woods on their right, following a small foot trail that showed signs of frequent travel.

Indu glanced over at Imei and started a conversation. “I appreciate your assistance back there,” he said. “We weren’t fully prepared for such an ambush.”

Imei smiled gently at Indu. “I’m also sorry for not making my presence known sooner. I’m sure you must have feared for a moment that I was yet another opponent.” He looked down, shifting his hands around the pouches at his waist.

“Were you following us for a purpose, or did you also come to investigate the rumors?” Indu asked.

Imei reached into his pouch and handed Indu a small container of ointment. “I had heard of strange shadow folk, and when I overheard you mention your intentions to the caravan last night, I decided to follow,” he nonchalantly explained, as if it were normal behavior to eavesdrop and follow.

Indu’s eyes widened with a mix of embarrassment and curiosity. “How did you manage to erase your presence to that extent?” he asked. “Surely Dekeshik is experienced enough to

notice another's presence before me, but not even he mentioned any concern of someone following us."

Imei looked proud. "I've spent years practicing something called the Erasure Pyri. It's similar to the Silent Pulse you've been using with your feet, but Erasure emits vibrations throughout my entire body," he explained, as Indu listened with fascination. "Using it, I attune my entire body to every environmental factor around me, allowing me to essentially negate my presence. It was devised by my people in Taili."

Dekeshik, who was walking ahead of Indu and behind Lorian, listened to their conversation. "I've heard of this Pyri. Perhaps I shouldn't have questioned its validity. Your mastery of it is quite impressive," he added, giving Imei a look of admiration.

They continued to walk for a moment before Indu finally recognized that Imei had handed him an ointment and asked, "Wait a minute, what is this?"

Imei suddenly realized he hadn't even mentioned what it was for and explained, "Oh! That's a medicinal ointment for your bruises. You took a nasty hit back there, same with your companio—"

"Advisor." Dekeshik interrupted bluntly.

Indu thinks to himself, *"He sure doesn't like to be called a companion. I wonder if he's afraid of building close relationships with people considering his past."*

"My apologies, Dekeshik," Imei continues, looking down and shuffling with his hands again, probably a nervous habit. "I wanted to help, that's all."

With a smirk and a chuckle, Indu responded, "Your demeanor feels as if you've been with us on our journey since it began," then continuing in a joking manner, "you haven't been following us since before the caravan, have you?"

Imei laughs, "No, I promise. Only since the caravan," he says reassuringly.

He was a kind man. It was clear that the virtues of the Moral Tablet had been imposed upon him since childhood and had grown to honor the value of integrity.

Lorian turns to look back at the three and points ahead, "we are nearing the site now. Don't be afraid, none of the people in camp are warriors."

As they entered the camp, there were numerous people sitting around an altar with a resonant stone carved in the shape of the sun, shining as the people surrounding it emit gentle vibrations into it while humming the beautifully melodious tune.

Indu closes the distance to Dekeshik, pointing toward two small groups of people set around a fire cooking meats and preparing vegetables. "Those must be the missing caravans the others mentioned," he said.

"It seems they aren't missing after all. They've decided to join the Ao'li," Dekeshik responds in confirmation.

Lorian guides them to a large tent in the center of the camp, with paintings of the Ao'li Sun on each side.

The interior of the tent was dimly lit by the flickering glow of several lanterns. The rich scent of incense mingled with the earthy aroma of both fresh culinary herbs and peppermint tea leaves, creating a calming atmosphere. Lorian motioned for Indu, Dekeshik, and Imei to sit on woven mats around a low wooden table. He poured tea from a beautifully crafted pot into small clay cups and handed one to each of them.

"This tea is made from herbs harvested by our tribe," Lorian explained, his voice soft and welcoming. "It helps to center the mind and calm the spirit."

Indu took a sip, the warm liquid soothing his throat. The taste was slightly bitter and earthy, with a hint of sweetness.

Lorian settled onto his mat, his posture relaxed but attentive. "You mentioned you came to investigate the shadow figures," he began, his eyes reflecting the light of the lanterns. "The rumors began only a few months ago. There were many caravans who knew of our people, some would even join us for tea. We have always dressed in black cloaks for our nightly rituals, but whoever began to circulate these rumors must have been confused or otherwise influenced."

Indu nodded, feeling a mix of relief and curiosity. "That explains a lot. We thought they were some kind of spectral beings."

Lorian chuckled softly. "No, we are very much human. But there is something you should know about the true threat we face—the one known as 'the messiah.'"

The tent fell silent, the only sound the gentle rustling of the canvas as a breeze passed through. Lorian's expression grew serious. "We know that he is responsible for the cataclysm. He has gathered followers from various tribes and kingdoms, forming large factions loyal to his cause. We don't know his true name or his exact whereabouts, but we do know of one stronghold to the west."

Dekeshik leaned forward, his eyes narrowing. "What do you know of his followers?"

Lorian sighed, his gaze distant. "Not much. But they are fervent in their belief in him, convinced that his actions are justified. They wear symbols of their allegiance, often marked with a twisted version of ancient runes. They have caused great suffering in their wake."

Indu felt a chill run down his spine. "And the other factions? Do you know where they are located?"

Lorian shook his head. "Only general regions. They are spread out, making it difficult to pinpoint their exact locations. But the faction to the west is the closest we know of with certainty."

Dekeshik looked to Indu, who appeared to be lost in thought, until Imei put a hand on his shoulder, refocusing his attention. Imei asks Indu, "Is there something on your mind?"

He looked to Imei with a face of gratitude for his compassion and spoke to Lorian, "Is it true, then? The rumors that a single man devastated the western half?"

Lorian let out a deep sigh and thought to himself for a moment before responding. "I didn't want to believe it myself. To think that one man could contain such a power is frightening, to say the least."

As he intently listened to Lorian's words, Dekeshik looked around the tent until settling his eyes upon a relic mounted behind Lorian on an ornately decorated mantle. "May I take a closer look at what you have on display behind you?" He asks quietly in an attempt to be as respectful to Lorian as possible.

Confused, Lorian turns around and looks to see what Dekeshik was inquiring about and responds, "Ah! I had quite forgotten that I was there. I haven't spent many days in my tent recently, in an attempt to help dispel the rumors of my tribe to any travelers passing through the area." He looks at Dekeshik with a smile and says, "Please, feel free to examine it. To be honest, I'm not entirely sure what it means, or hell. What it even is."

Dekeshik stands and walks over to the object, picking it up and looking closely at its intricate details. "I had no idea this was possible. I'd read fairytales as a boy of something like this but this is unbelievable," he mutters in a tone of awe and fascination.

Indu, now equally intrigued, approaches Dekeshik, who looks at him directly and hands the object over. "This is... a Resonant Petrified Elder root...?" he mutters in disbelief, and glances over to Lorian, "Where did you find this?"

Lorian, now increasingly interested in what he'd had, looks around for a moment and thinks back, "I believe one of my warriors had found it, actually. He brought it to me as a gift for having rescued him from Bakodun slavers," he says, and is struck with an epiphany

immediately after, “Actually, he was the one who dealt the kick to your face!” He says laughing, but quickly recomposes on seeing Dekeshik’s look of distaste. “Sorry, I can’t imagine something like that being a positive memory.”

“May I ask his name?” Dekeshik requests.

Lorian looks at him with a slight bow, and says “His name is Anlir. He hails from the southwest, from some place called the woods of... well... I can’t quite remem—”

“Iliaus?” Dekeshik blurts with a sense of urgency.

“Yes, actually, I do believe that is correct,” Lorian confirms, and turns back toward the entrance of the tent, continuing, “I believe right now he is headed with two of the women to the river to gather water, you might try to...” he pauses briefly, as Dekeshik suddenly bolts out of the tent before Lorian could finish his sentence, “ask him, of where he found the relic.” Now looking to Indu with concern on his face, “Does he normally act with such enigmatic behavior?”

Indu, now also showing concern, “Yes, but this time is different. I’ve never seen him in such a panic before.” He says, and continues, “He told me several nights ago that he was the sole survivor of the Amunairi people, from the woods—” now suddenly realizing what has transpired, “of Iliaus!” and bolts out the door to chase after him.

Imei glances at the tent’s entrance, and back to Lorian who also exchanged a glance, and then back to the entrance. “I think, um,” he pauses, feeling quite awkward and out of place, “I think I might go and see what this is all about,” pats his hands on his legs, and walks out the door to locate his new acquaintances.

Lorian, now sitting alone and unsure how to respond, shrugs his shoulders and leaves the tent to check on his people.

Meanwhile, Dekeshik frantically asks the villagers which way to the river. The very moment one pointed their finger in the right direction, Dekeshik burst away in a hurry. Indu, ever so

slightly behind, asks the same villager where Dekeshik had gone, and they once again point their finger as Indu also bursts away the moment he sees which way. Now Imei, walking slowly and awkwardly while glancing in all directions, also approaches the villager and asks, “um, you haven’t happened to see a couple of... strangers in a hurry, have you?” The villager, utterly confused, slowly points their finger in the same direction, and Imei responds with awkward gratitude, “Thanks,” nodding slightly and forcing a grin.

Dekeshik’s heart pounded in his chest as he raced down the river path, the world around him a blur of green and brown. His thoughts swirled with memories and questions, each one propelling him forward with renewed urgency. He could see the glint of sunlight reflecting off the river ahead, the sound of rushing water growing louder with each step.

As he neared the riverbank, Dekeshik spotted three figures. Two women were filling clay pots with water while a man stood watch, scanning the surroundings. Dekeshik recognized him immediately—the man who had kicked him during the earlier confrontation.

“Anlir!” Dekeshik called out, his voice tinged with desperation.

The man turned, his expression shifting from caution to surprise. He stepped forward, his eyes narrowing as he took in the sight of Dekeshik.

Indu arrived moments later, panting and wide-eyed. He saw Dekeshik and the man, and quickly realized he was witnessing a pivotal moment. Imei followed shortly after, still catching his breath and looking around nervously.

Anlir’s expression softened as he approached Dekeshik. “You know my name,” he said, more a statement than a question.

Dekeshik nodded, his voice shaky. “I do. You found this,” he held up the Resonant Petrified Elder root, “in the woods of Iliaus, didn’t you?”

Anlir’s eyes widened in recognition. “Yes, I did. It was something of my father’s, which he had buried among the roots of the ancient trees. But how do you know of Iliaus?”

Dekeshik took a deep breath, his hands trembling. "I am Dekeshik Amidnir, of the Amunairi people. The woods of Iliaus were my home."

Anlir's face slowly expanded with an expression of shock and a biting sadness, "I wasn't there, that night..." his composure dropping, as if he was readying to curl into a ball and cry. "Kaidni sent myself and 6 others to the northeast, to meet with the traders in Emni for furs."

Dekeshik, tears now welling in his eyes, took a step closer to Anlir. "I thought everyone was lost. I never imagined there could be others who survived."

Anlir's shoulders slumped, his voice breaking. "We had been captured by Bakodun slavers on our return... By the time Lorian helped me to escape, the 6 others had been killed. I returned home to find only ruins and silence. I've carried the guilt of not being there, not protecting our people."

Indu, sensing the gravity of the moment, stepped back slightly, giving the two men space. Imei stood beside him, his expression a mix of empathy and curiosity.

Dekeshik placed a trembling hand on Anlir's shoulder. "I never wish to experience this loneliness again."

Anlir nodded, wiping away a tear. "The root was a possession of my father's, it was the only thing I could bring with me as I left."

They made their way back to the Ao'li camp, the atmosphere was heavy with emotion. The sun was setting, casting long shadows and painting the sky in hues of orange and pink. The villagers they passed offered curious glances but remained respectfully silent.

Once they reached the camp, Lorian was waiting for them. He observed the group's somber expressions and immediately sensed the significance of their encounter. "It seems you have much to discuss," he said, leading them to a quiet corner of the camp where a small fire crackled invitingly.

They settled around the fire, the warmth a comforting presence in the cool evening air. Lorian poured tea, the same calming brew they had shared earlier, and handed the cups around.

Dekeshik began, his voice steadier now. "The stories I'd read as a boy spoke of this root, suggesting that It had purpose at one point in time."

Anlir nodded, staring into the flames. "Yes. It was said to hold great power, a relic of our ancestors' connection to the Elderwoods."

Dekeshik turned the relic over in his hands, examining its intricate details. "But now, it seems to be just that—a relic of the past. Its purpose has faded with time, much like our people."

Anlir sighed deeply. "I'd kept it safe, hoping it might one day reveal its secrets. But perhaps its purpose now is to remind us of who we were, and what we've lost."

Lorian listened intently, then spoke softly. "The past holds many mysteries, some of which may never be fully understood. But the knowledge and memories it carries are still valuable. They shape who we are and guide us toward the future."

Indu, sensing the weight of the conversation, added, "We can honor our ancestors by carrying their stories and lessons with us. This relic may no longer have a purpose, but it still holds great significance."

Imei, now feeling compelled to also add to the discussion, chimes in awkwardly but with confidence, "Yes. Correct," and glances around for looks of approval.

Lorian nodded thoughtfully.

The group sat in silence, apart from the crackling of the embers from the fire, until finally Anlir broke the silence. "Could you make it glow, for me?"

Dekeshik looked at him, overcome with a sense of honor. He held the Resonant Elder root carefully in his hands. "As you wish, brother." With a deep breath, Dekeshik focused his energy, emitting a steady but intense flow of vibrations.

The root began to glow softly at first, then gradually brightened. Its light grew so intense that it overpowered the flickering flames of the fire, casting the entire camp in a warm, ethereal glow. The intricate patterns within the root became visible, swirling and pulsing with ancient energy.

Anlir watched in awe, his eyes reflecting the radiant light. "It's more beautiful than I ever imagined," he murmured, his voice cracking with emotion.

Indu and Imei gazed at the glowing root, their faces bathed in its light. The moment felt sacred, and warm. A connection to the past, and a beacon for their future.

Dekeshik, still channeling the vibrations, felt a deep sense of peace and fulfillment. "This is our legacy," he said softly. "A reminder of who we are and where we come from."

The glow of the root seemed to pulse in time with their heartbeats, creating a rhythm that resonated deeply within each of them. It was a rare moment of pure unity in a discordant world.

As the glow slowly faded, the camp returned to the soft light of the fire. The group sat in contemplative silence, the weight of the moment settling over them, before finally, they part ways to rest for the night.

The next few days were spent immersing themselves in the life of the Ao'li people. The camp was a hive of activity, with men and women working together to gather supplies, repair structures, and prepare meals. The sound of laughter and conversation filled the air, mingling with the chirping of birds and the rustling of leaves.

Indu, Dekeshik, and Imei joined in, helping with the defense of the camp and participating in the spiritual communion with the tribe. The rituals were different from the Circulists of Ijalla, but Indu found them deeply fascinating and harmonious.

One evening, they gathered around a large fire. The flames danced and crackled, casting warm light on the faces of those seated around it. Lorian stood at the center, leading a chant that resonated with the very earth beneath their feet. The Ao'li swayed gently, their eyes closed, lost in the rhythm of the chant.

Indu watched in awe, feeling a deep connection to the land and its people. He glanced at Dekeshik, who nodded in agreement, and then at Imei, who smiled warmly.

After the chant, Lorian approached them. "You have been of great help to us," he said, his voice filled with gratitude. "Your presence has strengthened our spirits."

Indu bowed his head respectfully. "We are honored to be part of your community, even if only for a short time."

Lorian smiled. "Tomorrow, we will guide you to the edge of the Elderwoods. From there, you can continue your journey to the west."

Indu, Dekeshik, and Imei exchanged determined looks. The road ahead was uncertain, but with the support and knowledge they had gained from the Ao'li, they had a stronger sense of direction than before.

As Indu and Dekeshik approached the edge of the woods, morning light filtered through the trees, casting dappled shadows on the forest floor. Lorian led the way, with Anlir walking beside him.

Dekeshik turned to Indu, a rare, warm smile touching his lips. Indu, sharing in Dekeshik's rare moment of vulnerability, nodded. "You've made good friends here." Dekeshik nodded, and looked at Indu with a gentle smile, his eyes filled with sentimental joy.

Lorian stopped at the forest's edge and faced them. "This is where we part ways," he said. "Remember, the Ao'li will always welcome you."

Anlir extended his hand to Dekeshik. "It's been an honor," he said simply.

Dekeshik shook his hand firmly. "Likewise, brother Anlir. Stay safe."

Indu embraced Lorian. "Thank you for everything. We've learned so much."

Lorian returned the hug. "Travel safely. The Elderwoods' wisdom goes with you. Perhaps fate will have it that we meet again through our shared mission."

Anlir clasped Indu's shoulder. "Watch out for each other."

Imei approached and bowed deeply. "Thanks for the tea and... um, everything else."

Lorian chuckled. "Take care, Imei."

With final farewells exchanged, the three turned to face the open road. As they walked away from the Ao'li camp, the forest gradually gave way to open fields.

Indu glanced back one last time, seeing the figures of Lorian and Anlir fade into the distance. However to his surprise was Imei, following behind Dekeshik, once again with his Erasure active. Indu, half expecting Imei to travel together, chuckled and turned to face forward, openly accepting Imei's presence without hesitation.

"Let's see what lies ahead, we're slowly getting closer to making sense of it all," he said.

Dekeshik nodded, his usual stoic demeanor returning. Imei, walking alongside them, tried to lighten the mood. "Any idea how long until our next waypoint? I don't know how long my snacks will last between the 3 of us."

Indu smiled at Imei's attempt to ease the tension, as Dekeshik jumped slightly just noticing Imei had been following silently, followed by a shake of the head.

"You'll fit right in." Dekeshik gave a rare chuckle. "Just don't eat all our supplies."

The trio continued their journey, steps in unison, bound by the purpose that lay ahead and the new bonds they had formed.

- Chapter 5 -

Human Range

The trio set out from the Ao'li camp, the forest gradually giving way to open fields. The landscape was diverse, with rolling hills, dense forests, and rocky outcrops. They traveled in companionable silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

The sun was high in the sky, casting long shadows along the dusty road as Indu, Dekeshik, and Imei walked westward. The air was filled with the chirping of birds and the rustling of leaves. The landscape was a mix of sparse trees and patches of wildflowers, the path winding through the gentle hills.

Up ahead, they spotted a figure by the roadside. As they drew closer, they saw a man pacing anxiously beside an overturned cart, wares scattered across the ground. The man's clothes were dusty, and his face was etched with worry.

"Looks like someone's in trouble up ahead," Indu remarked, slowing his pace.

Imei quickened his steps, his curiosity piqued. "Maybe they need help. Come on!"

Dekeshik remained calm and cautious, his eyes scanning the surroundings for any signs of danger. "Stay alert. This could be a trap."

As they approached, the man noticed them and waved frantically. "Please, can you help me?" he called out, desperation evident in his voice.

Indu stepped forward, his expression concerned. "What happened?"

The man, introducing himself as Eldrin, gestured to his overturned cart. "A thief stole some of my valuable wares and fled into the woods. I tried to chase him, but I lost him in the trees."

Imei burst into the trees without hesitation, in total silence.

Indu briefly glanced where Imei ran, and nodded, determination setting in. "We'll get them back for you. Stay here and keep an eye on your cart."

Eldrin looked at them with relief and gratitude. "Thank you. Please be careful."

The trio headed into the woods, following the disturbed underbrush and broken twigs marking the thief's path. Imei leaped aimlessly ahead, using his Erasure Pyri to scout without making a sound. Indu and Dekeshik spread out, flanking the thief's trail.

After a few minutes of tracking, they caught sight of the thief, a wiry man with a sack over his shoulder, darting through the trees. Dekeshik jumped ahead, using Quake, a Pyri which caused the ground beneath the thief to tremble and crack, making him stumble and fall.

Indu closed the distance swiftly and tackled the thief, securing the stolen wares. The thief struggled briefly before realizing he was outmatched.

Indu sat atop the thief, briefly catching his breath. "You have things which do not belong to you," he said between breaths, staring at the man. He hadn't opened his eyes and looked at Indu once since having been tackled.

Imei, now staring at the man too, put his hand on Indu's shoulder gently, who looked up in curiosity and back down at the man. His face was shriveled, with tears streaming down his cheek.

The three looked at each other in confusion, each believing they'd caught the wrong man without directly conversing with one another, until he spoke, his voice breaking in defeat. "I didn't have a choice. My wife is starving, and my child lay on the brink of death from illness."

Indu, now reconsidering his approach asked him, "you couldn't find work?"

"I come from a small village northwest of here, there are no other towns nearby. Nobody would hire me because of my condition," the man responded, as he turned to reveal the left side of his face which he'd had hidden against the ground. It appeared as though

Back at Eldrin's cart, the sun now beginning to descend towards the horizon, the trio returned the stolen items. Eldrin was visibly relieved and grateful.

"Thank you, thank you! I don't know what I would have done without your help," he said, offering a few items from his cart as a reward.

Indu initially refused but eventually accepted a small, foldable cooking pot, recognizing its utility for their journey.

Eldrin provided them with valuable information about the road ahead. "Be careful on your journey. I've heard rumors about a stronghold to the west. It's heavily guarded and not friendly to outsiders."

Indu nodded, thanking Eldrin once more. "We'll keep that in mind. Safe travels to you."

Dekeshik advises to head north first, Imei agrees. They travel through Ryamur, hear rumors of the prophet of nothing.

They visit Taili, building relationships with Imei

They come across a fortified bastion headed west, and invade. Upon completion, they chase the head general, who turned out to be an informant for Dhari. They travel further west, and then south into the mountains and finally into an intricate cave/mine.

They are lost, until finally encountering Dhari, who Is masked and Adorn in ceremonial garb. The battle ends with the death of Imei, becoming the first Moral conflict.