

The Path of Least Resistance

Book One of the
Quantum Conjecture
Triology

by
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For what could have been,
For what couldn't have been,
For what could have not been,
For what couldn't have not been,
And for what might yet be in a state of quantum superposition.

Prologue

--- There are three sides to every story: Your side, my side, and the truth and no one is lying. Memories shared serve each differently. ---

Why am I here?

Chuckling lightly, the man paused his deliberate motions to take stock of his surroundings. Taking in the view left him breathless, as it always did; moreso than any exertion ever had. The view from this height was something savoured only by animals of flight and those luckless few who succumbed to the dangers of venturing too close to the edge of the narrow path.

As he turned his gaze downwards towards the untold leagues below him, he reached to the pouch hanging from his belt and covered his large, sweaty hands with the dry herb; his knee resting instinctively within a large crack he knew intimately. A shadow on the edge of his vision caught his eye and his attention quickly turned up to the purple sky. Squinting against the intense light of the triple stars that orbited this world, HIS world, his keen eyes detected the silhouette of a Rockspire Eagle as she prepared to strike at her intended victim. His heightened senses honed in on the ferocious creature as she effortlessly speared her target with her gigantic beak. Gracefully she turned at a seemingly impossible angle and, flapping her enormous wings, headed parallel to the cliff-face mere inches from his familiar path up the mountain. The Mountainshroud Lizard twitched as the life drained from its emotionless eyes. Even as the crimson blood gushed from the fatal head wound, its body still clambered in a vain effort to escape its untimely end.

Startled by the events that transpired, he closed his eyes and searched his awareness, pondering if he had sensed the Lizard's approach. For it was clear that the creature was stalking him at length before these events transpired. Recalling the deliberate motions of the creature as it tirelessly shadowed his recent course he considered his latest oversight.

It seems omniscience can make one careless.

A hearty laugh involuntarily rose from his stalwart chest. Realising the irony of his humour given his current predicament, he made a mental note to share the in-joke with his sister when he saw her next.

Grappling the nearest handhold, he continued to propel his tremendous frame up the cliff at a speed any Mountainshroud Lizard would be proud of. Before long the well-travelled path lay before him, only a few feet above his head. His matted, black hair glistening with sweat now stung his eyes as, for the second time that radiant afternoon, he found himself caught uncharacteristically unaware.

His focus drawn to the striking brunette standing just above his hands, he stared innocently at the first person that had crossed his path in days.

"Dear Goddess!" he swore, only a moment before her shrill scream filled the heavy summer air. His focus drawn to this stunning creature poised majestically at the path's edge, he smiled innocently as her athletic legs twisted her lithe body away from his invasion. Pausing to fill his lungs with the resources necessary to explain his latest foolishness, her agile frame turned impossibly fast as she delivered a swift kick to his abdomen.

A faint smile crossed his lips as he instantly lost his grip on the rocky outcropping that moments before had been a path to salvation. Closing his eyes the purple sky filled his mind as he tumbled backwards.

"My name is Irkuin" he shouted as the boundless expanse below reached up to claim the

latest imbecile to challenge its nothingness.

He heard her whisper faintly, "My name is Eimear" before the rushing onslaught of air drowned out all sounds save his own terrified scream. Upon opening his eyes once more, the jagged cliffs waved goodbye to their latest tourist, and the fluorescent indigo of the Giant Bluewood forests became visible. Little more than droplets on the landscape at first, they quickly became unmistakable as the lofty branches rose up to greet his tumultuous descent.

The last memory of his fading consciousness was that of the largest Rocksphear Eagle he had ever seen, hurtling towards his already broken body immediately before his abrupt halt. The cause of this rapid deceleration, a twisted branch the size of his calf protruding from his chest. Before finally passing out in agony, he caught sight of the Eagle triumphantly transforming into the silhouette of his would-be assassin, Eimear.

Chapter 1

--- Memory is a way of holding on to who you are... whether you want to or not. ---

Who am I?

As Irkuin awoke with a start, to a throbbing headache, the only memory of a dream, that even now was slipping from his conscious mind, was a single thought.

His senses of the waking world returning, he felt different though could not comprehend why he felt this way. Yet he instinctively knew that something was wrong. His hand reached to his aching head and grasped the cold damp cloth that clung to his forehead. A layer of sweat hung on the thin rag.

An immense jolt struck his body as a sudden memory came surging to his conscious mind, "Eimear!" he hoarsely yelled.

The reflex unbidden and strangely disturbing, he coughed loudly as his dry mouth screamed for water. Yet thoughts of water quickly fled his weary mind as he relived his fall from the top of the highest peak in this region. Strangely, though he could remember his favoured route up the cliff face - a trip he had taken countless times - he could not recollect the simplest of events from his childhood. Panicked, he desperately struggled to find the first memory he could recall yet as he tried to do so the same scene played before his eyes. His grandesque plummet through the purple skyline and his sudden crash into the ocean of Bluewood below.

While examining this curious enigma further, the door of his room opened. Startled as he realised he did not recognise this place, his first thought was to examine his surroundings and yet even this action was interrupted by the feeling that somehow this concept was foreign to him. Looking to the doorway expectantly, a curious scent of Firelilys hung in the stale air of his lodgings.

Held transfixed in the doorway was a beautiful and proud Elven woman.

"Irkuin! You're awake!" Eimear said as she rushed to his bedside.

Reaching for the rag on his forehead, she delicately placed it in the pot of water nearby and tenderly dabbed his forehead.

"And your fever is broken. Goddess! I thought we had lost you numerous times!"

"I am so sorry for my treatment of you when first we met. You caught me completely unawares, a state no Elven warrior is accustomed to. I fear my reflexes took over and I..." whatever she was about to say drifted into the lingering silence as she followed his eyes while they urgently searched his surroundings.

"You are in the healer's den of the Palace, my father insisted when I brought you to him and told him the story of our... first encounter" guilt gripped her once more and she turned her powerful gaze away from his probing eyes.

Irkuin coughed abruptly, as much to fill the silence as to satisfy his aching throat. Deftly Eimear handed him a nearby container of water and began pacing around his bed. As he began draining the container quickly she stopped suddenly as if to speak causing him to pause in anticipation.

"What were you doing there anyway..? Are you ok? The healer said you should make a full recovery but that your head was struck sharply, and there may be some temporary complications. But nevermind, I need to tell you something; something I've never told anyone."

As she noticed his fascination with the mug her temper flared, she grabbed it from his hand and flung it across the room. "Are you even listening to me?!"

Irkuin spoke gently, but not without a hint of sarcasm, "Milady, you seemed content to dwell in your own thoughts as much as to speak to me. I merely sought to give you sufficient time to do so. That beautiful trinket provided a fascinating distraction."

Eimear yelled, "It...it was my brother's!" before running through the open door and slamming it shut in what seemed a single motion.

As Eimear felt the large Bluewood door slam behind her warding her escape, her anger immediately quelled and she hesitated for a moment, her tensed hand still grasping the rustic handle. Feeling foolish, she dared not return to the scene of her crime and instead gathered her wits and sought out the healer. Turning right and heading down the long picturesque hallway she noted each portrait and bowed her head in reverence as her mother had taught her so long ago.

As she reached the most recent portraits her gait slowed until she arrived at her immediate families'. A tear threatened to escape her eyes and cascade down her beautiful face. Shaking her head, she couldn't help but recall the day of its creation. The day she destroyed her family. The day her innocence was lost. The day her brother, Tared, fled their overprotective parents. The day she was left alone.

A creaking floorboard distracted her from her self-pity and drew her attention to the approach of someone behind.

No doubt one of her parent's lackeys coming to check up on her movements. Wiping her eyes she turned to greet the oncoming serpent with just the right amount of hostility and patience that only a Princess could bring to bare.

Surprised as she found only an empty corridor, she delayed in her procrastination for only a moment more before reluctantly resuming her course. She set off for the waiting healer to put in motion her plan. A plan to restore her family and reclaim her innocence; to seek out a lost brother so that she might never be alone again.

Irkuin sat up in his bed, noting the blatant extravagance in this healers quarters. Smirking he quickly surmised that this was no ordinary healer's quarters. A healer would live in a hut, a famous healer might live in a small home with some minor trinkets of thanks from those affected by the success of the art; but this. This was a cesspool of exorbitance with barely a hint of the humility that healers were reknowned to possess.

Beggars can't be givers.

Impatience siezing him, Irkuin threw the bedlinen off his broad form and leapt from the bed, instantly regretting the action as his legs gave ground to pain and he stumbled backwards. With a sigh he braced himself and clambered to his feet, muttering "And ignorance goes before a fall."

As he regained a surefooting Irkuin took to surveying the room once more. Seeing little of consequence, his eye was abruptly drawn to a portrait of what could only be the healer who occupied these chambers and meaning quickly took form.

Blessed Royalty, I should have known; recognised the air of self-importance.

Laughter giving way to exhaustion, he stumbled back to the bed and resumed his agony from a horizontal position.

Rounding the last corner at great speed, Eimear struck the Grand Spirary headlong, sending both flying to the floor.

"Now Princess, what would your mother say about such foolishness!" Fear in her eye betrayed her feelings even when the healer jumped to his feet and chuckled at his latest jibe.

"I'm informed your friend has at last rejoined the land of the living! I must go to him. The blow he received would not have wounded an Elf so badly and a Human wouldn't have survived the fall at all, as for a Dwarf... well, they have little stomach for heights. We must investigate his origins, lest the Inquisitor see fit to label him a heretic and smite him for his crimes"

Eimear grimaced at the idea of the Inquisitor becoming involved. The thought led her to think of her brother and an old wound quickly rose to fore.

"How go the preparations? Now that Irkuin is awake, I would like to leave by dawn.", she said quickly, trying to quell her racing memories.

"I know not, Nunca was taking supplies to the caravan when last we spoke, she should be almost finished. Your schedule seems intact but I fear Irkuin may not be fit for such a journey."

"We'll see. I must visit the Spiral before I depart and seek my parents' counsel" and with that Eimear transformed into an eagle and was gone.

Children never learn. She's not yet ready to embrace her heritage, let alone lead an army.

Chapter 2

--- Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. When the real heart of the matter is to live everything. Especially the questions. ---

Where am I?

Irkuin awoke to darkness, a thought teased his weary mind. As awareness reached him, his eyes registered movement in the darkness. Sensing an attack, he raised his hands in time to block a furred paw from swiping his head clean off.

“Forgiveness! I thought you yet slept!”

A light exploded to life nearby and floated to eyelevel. It was only then that he registered the form of a giant cat monster, with its giant claws poised as if to feast, hovering over his bed. As his eyes adjusted to the crepuscular light, Irkuin stared in astonishment as the creature's giant shell disappeared from its back and the beast gradually morphed into a short, dishevelled old man.

“What manner of creature are you?” and yet no sooner had he given voice to question, he remembered Eimear's bizarre transformation from eagle to woman in seconds.

“I am the Grand Spirary, you may call me 'Grand Spirary', 'Bringer of Light', or 'Help, I'm dying!'. Though my name is Kafee”, at the utterance of his name, Kafee grinned widely, as though he emanated healing through his jolly demeanour. “I am an elf first and foremost, though my aspect is that of the Panzerkatz.” said Kafee, as he smiled disarmingly.

“I am Irkuin. Could you tell me where exactly I reside?”

In answer Kafee turned away from Irkuin and the floating ball of light, which served as the only illumination in the room, moved with him. Forming shapes with his wrinkled hands, the orb sparkled for an instant and then slowly shrank. Just as it appeared to extinguish it flared brilliantly once more before splitting into thousands of tiny lesser lights which flew to the ceiling in a familiar spiral pattern.

“Where you reside is in my bed, in my quarters, in the Royal Palace, in the capital city of Inishmor at the heart of the 14th Elven Empire.”

As Irkuin nodded, seemingly taking in all this new information, Kafee smirked before adding,

“Now if you are quite finished with your interrogation, I would like to continue examining your wounds... though perhaps lack thereof would be more accurate... you appear to have a lot in common with the Tragenkatz.”

“Thank... you...?” Irkuin weakly stuttered, as he slipped once more into unconsciousness.

If you'd ever met one you'd know that wasn't a compliment.

Kafee chuckled as his form retook that of a Panzerkatz, his giant shell did nothing to impede his movement as his sharp claws gently removed the soiled bandages from his charge.

Eimear rounded the corner with even greater speed, despite her focus on listing back her supplies to herself, she was more aware than before, determined not to repeat her collision with the Spirary.

Few aspects are as gentle as the Panzerkatz, others may not take a collision with the Princess so gracefully.

Still, despite her split focus and intense concentration, Eimear couldn't help but overhear an argument from down the third corridor of the Spiral. Drawn to the shouting, it wasn't long before she could hear the familiar voice of her friend and protectors, Nunca.

Eimear heard the yelling, though still thankfully, no sounds of physical conflict.

"I appreciate that you've limited stocks available. I also understand that the Queen herself has placed an embargo on new withdrawals of shards from the Royal supply but please, try to see this from my perspective."

With renewed vigor Eimear followed the gently sloping corridor towards the warehouses. The complex wasn't designed with flight in mind and her brief leaps gave her increased speed but left little clouds of dust with each flap of her wings. Eimear could barely see when she came upon the scene of a tiny Elven girl banging the largest Bluewood door in the building, with deafening thumps. Her minute frame seemed ready to bash the door to pulp with her bare fists. Following a complete stop, Eimear noticed the telltale signs of rage coming from the diminutive creature.

"In less than 24 hours we're heading crosscountry to the lands of the Dwarves with the Princess in tow. Shortly after that happens, we will be left to tend to ourselves against all manner of demons, beasts and fauna that will certainly try to kill us and eat us, hopefully in that order." Nunca shouted, now clearly losing her patience.

The veins on her face pulsed with rage, though it was becoming harder to tell with the rapid increase in her physical size. Still, the most troubling hint of her aspect overwhelming her usually stoic demeanour was the silver line of fur that was appearing from the back of the young elven head, just below her hairline. Her ponytail too, began to change from it's bright, golden crown to a more foreboding shade of silver.

"This mission, might I add, has the full support of the Princess, her parents the King and Queen and the Royal court. If you still have a problem with it storemaster, I suggest you delay me further and your dismembered corpse can explain your hubris to the Queen personally."

"Nunca! Please Grandaunt, try to stay calm. He is not your enemy!" Eimear screamed loudly even as she gently placed her hand on the small elf's shoulder. Nunca turned to face the Princess and her hand clutched the pendant around her neck. As she did so a faint glow rose from the Spiral necklace and the rage faded from her face. Her form seemed to shrink even further as the elf took a deep breath and exhaled in a practiced ritual.

"You're right, of course your highness. I intended no violence just a silly joke to keep things moving. We have no time for distractions, as tasty as it might be."

With that, the cowering man gulped in fright and hastily opened the door, indicating for her to pass. Nunca casually stepped by while eyeing the man warily and licking her lips. The storemaster withdrew into the shadows of the storehouse vanishing instantly.

"The Inquisitor shall hear of this!" he yelled the fear still evident in his tone. Nunca and Eimear turned to one another giggling incessantly before Nunca spoke once more, all signs of anger gone from her voice.

"There are advantages to having the reputation of a mindless, feral beast when trying to get things done."

"I swear half the tales of the Tragenkatz are overembellished retellings of the arguments of cowards." Eimear said, trying to stop the giggling from becoming hysterical laughter.

The tiny girl only smiled as she hefted a large crate of shards above her head with one hand.

"Only half?" she said, before skipping through the door with a stupid grin plastered across her face.

Eimear hated the Royal forest chambers at the centre of the Spiral. The putridly sweet smell reminded her of the last time she laid eyes on Tared even as the gentle breeze rustled the leaves of the topmost branches. In a moment her mind's eye was a child again and she saw the chambers dark and threatening as only a child can, when surrounded by family.

“Tared Nar Du Yaraz, you have been found guilty of aiding an enemy of the Kingdoms. Your punishment is banishment for no less than 200 years on penalty of death. Any seed of your loins will be struck down with equal zeal until such time as your banishment is ended. Do you have anything to say?”

Eimear shook her head to escape the memory and pressed on to speak with her parents.

There will be plenty of time for regrets when I am Bauben.

Navigating the forest maze, Eimear quickly strode to the familiar clearing and placed her bag at her feet, before saying the ancient prayer.

“Mother earth, Father sky, I implore ye.

Renew my kin until thee,

Release wisdom that yet be,

Hope grant unto me.”

After finishing saying the words, Eimear produced a dark glass jar from her bag and poured the contents on the ground. The forest was well tended in modern times but the tradition of watering the Bauben was as old as the prayer.

The two trees closest to her shone yellow before exploding in an infusion of colours. The light dimmed and the familiar appearance of her mother and father seemed to step out of the trees.

Racing to their embrace, Eimear hugged both, almost bowling them over.

“I’m sorry it’s been so long since my last visit, a lot has happened since I had your counsel.”

The tall, male elf embraced her lovingly and kissed her forehead. “We have much to discuss, flower of mine.” he said softly, before stepping aside to stare at the sky.

Eimear blushed as the woman spoke impatiently, “She is a flower no longer Allafar, she is an elven Princess. Soon our voices will quiet and she will be queen, you must stop spoiling her.”

Eimear felt a tear fall from her eye as her mother hugged her dispassionately, before joining her husband to stare at the moons and star.

“He is an enigma, a stranger and you would bring him on a sensitive diplomatic mission in a time of war. He could be a spy or an assassin! Allafar, please talk sense to your daughter.”

“You know as I, Bose, our daughter will do as our daughter will do. The spirits themselves guided her to him, what good is the word of a father in the face of destiny?” said Allafar with just the hint of a smile.

“Bah, spirits, destiny; I see death has done little to rid you of your foolishness. It’s no wonder she acts without thinking when you fill her head with trivial nonsense.” spat Bose, her face reddening with anger. “We walk less and less with each full moons and may never do so again in this season and you would waste time with nonsense.”

“I see death has done little to rid you of your impatience dear, my child has come to speak with us and you waste time with lectures. Don’t you want to hear what she has to say?”

Bose turned to find the clearing empty, the sound of her daughter’s tears the only thing to fill the quiet night.

Chapter 3

--- There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way and not starting. ---

Where am I going?

For the third time in as many hours, Irkuin awoke from a restless sleep with a pounding migraine and a resounding thought obsessing his waking world.

As he sat-up he began to register the unsteady motion of the wagon which helped shake his mind clear, before he began to realise the importance of his questioning thought.

"We left before dawn, in the cover of darkness. There are always human spies in the hills around Inishmor. Nunca hoped to evade notice for as long as possible." said Eimear.

Is she trying to reassure me or herself?

"You never told me you were a Princess" he said, even as he took a moment to truly examine her appearance for the first time, "You certainly don't look like any Elven Princess I've ever known."

"Have you known a lot of Princess' then?" she said teasingly. She broke his gaze, staring into the back of the wagon, watching the muddy road flow past relaxed her like watching the river never could.

"I believe the last Princess existed over a thousand years ago, it's not a common custom." she said sadly.

Irkuin began to answer but quickly raised his hand to his head as the thumping pain seemed to overwhelm his senses. "I don't... I think I need more rest."

His last action before succumbing to the tranquility of the void was to place his hand on hers. Eimear could have sworn she heard him whisper "We find him."

Nunca glared across the countryside, occasionally sniffing the early morning air. All nine moons were still visible despite the first sun rising in the west.

Chasing the ladies away!

She laughed, as much to ease her tense mind than at her father's silly joke. The moons made her Tragenkatz aspect anxious. She wanted to run, to hunt, to kill; when instead she must settle for fleeing. Fleeing an enemy that even now must be realising their goal lay in a simple hemp wagon with only a small company of guards and miniscule defenses.

A feast of Blood will lie at the end of this journey, if not before.

The thought oddly sated the beast within and for a moment she grinned malevolently. Distracted, it took her longer than normal to notice the scent of prey coming towards them.

"Perhaps we may have a proper breakfast yet" she snarled, as her hand reached for the silver charm around her neck.

"What do you mean, Travellers?" Eimear said, while taking the seat alongside Nunca. Panic gripped her features as she thought of conflict so soon after leaving the city. The rest of the caravan had been signalled to slow as they dealt with this latest development.

The success of this plan hinges on not presenting arms so close to the capital.

The longer they could travel without drawing attention the greater the odds of their safe arrival.

"I mean smelly, sweaty travellers, three riders, three mounts heading towards us with haste. No sign of the rest of their squad assuming they are even soldiers. They're a little over 8 kilometres southeast, we should be able to see them once we get over that hill, we'll know more then."

Eimear glared into the distance at the peak Nunca was pointing at. Little more than a hill by Tragen standards, it certainly felt like a mountain to her. Still, she knew better than to argue with her elders.

“And what do we do then?” Eimear asked, the note of worry was growing more obvious in her voice, she looked at Nunca as much to examine her reaction to the question, “Fight or run?”

“Well personally, I'm hoping I'll get to eat something that isn't stale breadstakes this morning but we shouldn't need to run. I'm not sure we could if we wanted to, so lets call that plan C, shall we?”

“So plan A: eat, plan C: run... that must mean plan B is all me then, right?” Eimear said, trying not to sound concerned. The last time she saw Nunca feasting still brought a shudder.

“Just let me do the talking, ok?” said Eimear, again glancing at Nunca out of habit. The Spiral necklace glowing dimly served as little comfort. “Cover your necklace and try not to glare too much. You know how it makes strangers wary.”

“An elf, a dwarf and possibly a human, though certainly not a purebred, possibly a hillman or just a lunatic. One of them is conjuring illusions, it's hard to get a good smell with all the magic in the air but I don't think we have anything to fear though. They seem too terrified of something behind them to be concerned about us.” Nunca spoke with a great amount of disappointment obvious in her voice. She yawned and stretched her small limbs, handing Eimear the reins to the horsehares pulling the wagon. The large brown beasts barely reacted to the change in driver, only their massive floppy ears twitched as she resumed, “I'm going to get some sleep, Irkuin will join you in a moment. He's already awake.”

With that the small elf placed her hand on Eimear's shoulder and spoke, “I expect food when I wake, preferably a fresh kill. If I have to eat...”

“...if you have to eat breadstakes again you'll be taking an ear to fill your sandwich”, Nunca giggled as Eimear finished her sentence. The Tragenkatz stumbled through the curtain that seperated the driving seats from the makeshift home in the back. Eimear's weak smile faded as she once again hoped that the little elf was joking.

Eimear watched the tiny specks get closer and closer, her eagle aspect didn't give her the sense of smell of a Tragenkatz, yet she could just about make out the figures in the distance. The bright morning sun did little to aid the task but she could see now that one of the riders was wounded. The sound of shouting behind her brought her back to the moment, as Irkuin came tumbling from the back.

“She's not a morning person I take it?” he said, before slumping down beside Eimear. He stretched his tired muscles, shading his unaccustomed eyes from the uncomfortable brightness of the morning. Four moons were still visible and they made the sun's rays all the more palpable. The Wilderforests around them glistened with the morning dew and for a moment, Eimear wished she could be back in the Spiral forests for just one more sunshower.

“Demon's don't tolerate the morning sunshower all that well. At least not without blood on their lips and we dare not stop so soon after our departure. We must pass through the Glens before midday or all may be lost.” Eimear smiled weakly and spurred to action by her words, clicked twice and whipped the reins, signalling to the horsehares to pick-up speed.

“Demons?” said Irkuin, his voice grated a little and his hand quickly ran to his head but he remained conscious. A good omen if nothing else. “What manner of creature is she?”

“She's an elf, no less than I, but her aspect is a Tragenkatz they rarely stay civilised for long. Grandaunt Nunca was my Grandfather's sister, born when his father became Bauben for a second time. She's one of the oldest of us alive today and the oldest Tragen to remain sane, before her father.”

“Kafee, spoke of the Tragenkatz, what are they exactly?” said Irkuin, fascinated by the

discussion.

“The Tragenkatz are one of the oldest aspects, some say the first and these mountains are full of them. This caravan has a full platoon of Royal soldiers as an escort with almost all of the varieties of aspects available at my command, yet if we don't reach the Glens before they wake from their slumber, we shall be little more than a banquet by trilight. They make for an impeccable defense against invasion, but sadly they do little for a pleasant trip south.”

Irkuin sat in deep thought for a few moments, before hurriedly examining his surroundings. His eyes flickered to the suddenly claustrophobia-inducing mountains and he sighed morosely.

“The greater question seems to be, what manner of creature are you?” Nunca said, breaking the silence. “You're clearly not an elf, or a dwarf for that matter and humans are not nearly as clueless as you by their nature. Where do you come from? What were you doing on that mountain?”

“I am Irkuin. I'm afraid I don't remember where I come from, or how I ended up on that mountain. There is very little I do remember to be honest, but I know one important thing right now.” he said, his eyes growing wide.

“And what great insight do you have to teach me?” said Eimear, hints of annoyance and humour mixing in her voice.

“You're wrong. The greater question seems to be...” answered Irkuin, immune to Eimear's now derisive stare and rising temper, “...these demons you spoke of, how exactly do you kill them?” As he finished Irkuin raised his right hand to point at a nearby peak. The howl of a Tragenkatz pack left his question unanswered.

Chapter 4

--- Do not cry havoc, where you should but hunt with modest warrant ---

The last of the moons hung low in the eastern skies just as the suns eagerly climbed the purple horizon. The morning was just beginning in earnest, as Anther, the second sun of three began its' daily climb through the skies. A dwarf in rusted mail shone like fire as her blood-stained armour caught the morning light. Her companions, unarmoured but no less blood-stained, endeavoured to keep up with the more experienced rider. The elf, sporting only a shield with the symbol of a Spiral crossed by two swords, worn squarely on his back. His light armour, made barely a whisper while he constantly surveiled his surroundings. The human, smaller than both his dwarf and elf companion and clothed in only a simple grey robe and hood, possessed a steely glare that did little to hide reserves of strength.

"I need a drink." moaned the dwarf gruffly, as she stalled her horse waiting for her companions. She coughed hoarsely, bringing a fresh tint of blood to her lips. Her left hand reached to her side where an open wound further stained her haggard armour.

"Anther rises to greet us and guide us home to the forests" said the elf, nervousness clear in his voice. "I'm not sure we will see another trilight let alone another drink, Neeka"

"The Source says we have many sunrises yet fair Konos, our redemption lies over these hills, though we must first be the means of our salvation" said the human, his voice laboured as he struggled to maintain his grip on his mount.

"The Source... the Source... the Source. You speak of Gods when it is clear that they have abandoned us, Levas." Neeka growled, pain and impatience stoked a fiery temper in the dwarf. She urged her zonkey into a trot.

"He may be right, I hear fighting, just over the hill. The Tragenkatz are there... they may have followed us" Konos calmly said, all signs of nervousness fleeing his voice. "My spell may have led the Tragen unto some unsuspecting fools. We must give aid! If I am to Bauben this day, it will not be with failing to protect the innocent twice stained upon my soul!"

"If they are in front, then let us pause a moment to heal our wounds, we may need our full strength before Trither rises" said Levas, his resolve apparent in his voice.

Producing a simple, leather bound book from beneath his robes he ushered his zonkey between his companions. Mumbling unintelligibly, the human raised the tome to his forehead and placed his other hand upon the dwarf. The chain-linked armour barely held her internal organs in their rightful place but as his words slowed, the wound began to rapidly close until all that was left was a tiny pink scar in the shape of a crescent moon. Repeating the same actions on the elf and himself, Levas yawned with exhaustion even as colour began returning to his face.

"If we are to fight, then I'll need to check my armour. That Tragentrash got a piece of me with that last attack, my armour was barely functional to begin with. I don't have fancy claws or magical mumbojumbo like you freaks" said Neeka as she dismounted, a grin already forming on her tired face.

Taking a step away from the animals, Neeka clashed her wrists together as the familiar sound of crackling energy surged forth. Pistons and cogs purred as the ancient armour whisked into motion.

"There's life in the ol' girl yet!" she said, as a yellow sphere materialised in her left palm. Drawing back her arm, she flung the crackling energy ball at a nearby rock and grinned as it exploded into countless pieces.

"If the Gods are real, I pray I never grow tired of that!" she said excitedly, as she leapt onto her zonkey's back.

“Second column, protect the left flank! Third column, reinforce First! If they break through then the Royal line may be severed for the first time in 14 generations. Would you have your honour stained so! Better that we Bauben this day than our enemies break our will! Show them why we Royal guard exist!” yelled Nunca.

Standing atop the stationary wagon, her now fully silver hair flurried in the morning breeze as her hulking form bellowed and with sword in hand she leapt unto the nearest hostile Tragenkatz. Her sword impaled the larger, beastly combatant to the ground through the chest. Nunca's Spiral necklace now attached to the hilt of her sword glowed brightly until it exploded into a supernova of light that struck down all the nearest Tragenkatz. Their bodies quickly began to turn to bark as three new Bauben took root. Warped and rotten, the fresh Bauben quickly crumbled under their own weight until all that remained were three dessicated treestumps. Nunca couldn't help but react with a howl at the first kill, even as she grimaced at the ultimate fate of all Tragenkatz.

**Bauben once, shame on me,
Bauben twice, still a tree,
Bauben thrice, not as fun,
Bauben 'gain and all is done.**

Nunca couldn't help recall her father's words, as she always did when facing her death. The other aspects fear their rage and view it as their greatest strength. The Tragen have a different opinion. They see their greatest weakness as the source of their greatest strength. Tragenkatz must fight for now, with every fiber of their being, for their lives are but a fraction of their brethren. Nunca became the latest testament to this philosophy, as her claws tore at the nearest enemy, with a frenzied passion.

Flames and smoke could be seen rising from the wagon at the rear even as Tragenkatz leapt through the air onto bear, cat and eagle alike, piercing hide, shell and feather with equal ease. Even the Royal Guard were no match for the seasoned veterans amongst the Tragenkatz pack.

Two of the Tragen, watched from the sidelines of the battle, a heavily armoured black and white striped female stood dwarfed by her companion, an eight feet tall behemoth with a gray and gold fur. Seemingly satisfied with the current state of the conflict, they waded through the slaughter occasionally swiping the head from a nearby, unsuspecting guardsman, before approaching the first wagon.

Even in her frenzied condition, the now unrecognisable form of Nunca, covered in a plethora of her foes' blood, turned and howled at the approaching vanguard. Contemptuously she clawed the jugular of her current foe and took off at a sprint as the poor fool fell to his knees grasping at his neck. A few seconds later he was little more than a brown and black pile of compost as Nunca clambered towards the latest threat.

Nunca approached the wagon in three tremendous leaps but the black and white Tragenkatz growled and spoke sharply, “Ishkah, deal with the runt!” Immediately, Ishkah prepared to face his newest foe by unsheathing his enormous claymore and raising it above his head. In a flash, the gray and gold beast leapt at Nunca with a speed that belied his gargantuan size. As the two demons were about to clash in mid-air, Ishkah drew his sword down in a motion to strike, but Nunca was no longer there. Instead, the proud warrior howled as she reclaimed her sword and raised it above her head. As she did so, she sprang towards the off-balance Ishkah and plunged her sword into his shoulder. Her amulet glowed a brilliant white as the ancient magic prepared to trigger another tremendous explosion. Nunca just smirked even as she snarled, “Morning brother. Still Stara's lapdog, eh?”

“Now?”, whispered Konos. “This armour was not intended to be worn while nestling atop a

witchelm tree. Or climbing... or swinging through witchelm trees... generally anything involving trees is bad with armour. Can we attack now?"

"Not yet, we still don't know what's going on. Why is there a Tragentrash helping the elves? What are the Tragen after, because it clearly ain't food. They are up to something and I for one would like to know more before we go leaping into a Tragen sandwich!" exclaimed Neeka.

"The source recommends we stay put a few moments longer. We will know the sign when we see her.", said Levas exhaustedly.

"What does that even... fine... 2 minutes, then we go." said Neeka even as she sighed in frustration.

No point arguing with Levas or his precious source. Human's are idiots. Well informed, but still idiots.

Chapter 5

--- There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody's expense but his own. ---

Irkuin stumbles out of the wagon, is introduced to the black and white tragen female Stara.

Gets roughed up by Stara.

Nunca cuts the tarp off the side of the wagon.

Eimear detonates a massive ball of light above the fight.

Heroes intervene

Reinforcement Tragen arrive.

Everyone runs like fuck.

Chapter 6

---Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. ---

The group reach the border and the cleric departs for human lands, to join the war effort - or rather to heal both sides.

Dwarven patrols discover the group and offer to escort them to the dwarven capital. They bring them to a train system that uses a vacuum tunnel to travel great distances really quickly.

We learn a little about dwarven technology and their culture.

To do:

Introduce Mia briefly

Introduce the crystals

Introduce the Royal court

Ultimogeniture: last borne child is the heir to the throne. Initially it was Eimear's younger brother

Tared who was to be crowned king and

she was free to lead a normal life (as normal a life as a princess can take) but since he fled, she was left with the role of being Queen.

Heiress presumptive.

Dual prophecies. Two prophecies, one from humans and one from elves with two unlikely outcomes, but results that are mutually exclusive.

I don't thrive on conflict, I've merely learned to survive it. Perhaps a little too well... I can't take sides anymore, not even my own. Yet Life is conflict, why should I be any different. Nature takes no sides, the one who wins is the one who is best equipped to deal with the conflict. Sentient beings are similar but less crude. They bring conflict to the micro cosmos as well as the macro. Tiny things bringing their tiny personal perspective to something that is so very rarely within their ability to truly grasp. Even a petty squabble has multiple dimensions that are never all visible to the individual. The fact that the other side can perceive another point of view, their point of view, gives it substance. Perception of their reality, is far more important than whatever the actual reality may be. Not to the universe, of course, like everything else it continues with its own reality, regardless of yours. But consider for a moment what would happen if you could force the universe to consider your point of view for a time. What limitless universes you would create. What possibilities you would allow. The unimaginable chaos you would create and still insane order you would unleash. Every side of every coin, even its edge in its infinite complexity would be catered to. I wonder if any one of the endless spectrum would be better than the other or if the fluidity of uncertainty would bring greater peace. Perhaps even the only peace.

Book 1: The Path of Least Resistance

We are introduced to Irkuin. An important ancilliary character. Irkuin intersects with the story at key points, and progressing the story while not being a central part of it. His wedding is an insignificant event which involves all of the main characters and is used to explain important elements of the nature of Irkuin's abilities.

See character details for more information.

3 Races are introduced. 3 crystals are being used, one by each of the races for fundamental purposes. When 1 orb is stolen from the hive mind race, they go to war with the other races seeking a new orb.

It is discovered that the Hive mind cannot exist safely without an orb.

Irkuin intervenes to resolve the conflict, calming all races brokering a treaty between the Elven Race and the Hive Mind to agree to share the orb until a long-term solution can be found.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the elves

Slight introduction of the crystals

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. When the real heart of the matter is to live everything. Especially the questions”

Elven history, rumours of recent wars, Eimear's sister's disappearance, Irkuin's recovery and conversation with his "sister"

The proximity of the orbs is heavily overshadowed as being implicit in the developing of multiple guardian aspects. Eimear goes on to unlock three guardians by visiting each of the orbs. The royal lines would always have visited the other races as dignitary visits were commonplace. Even the royal guard would have had sufficient exposure to develop a second and sometimes even third guardian aspect.

Chapter 2

"Where am I going?"

Eimear travels with Irkuin to meet the dwarves regarding her missing sister.

Chapter 3

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.

Irkuin and Eimear meet three adventurers in the wild, who offer to escort them to the border.

Refugees, fleeing the incoming armies.

Vause – name of an adventurer.

Chapter 4

The group meet a cleric on their travels and are attacked by a band of humans. We are introduced to elements of the war and the limits of

Eimear's abilities. Irkuin proves lacklustre at swordplay. The adventurers save the day.

Chapter 5

There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody's expense but his own.

Highborne and Lowborne races.

Elves, dwarves and humans are the highborne races. Lowborne races can be hobbits, halflings and orcs or *literal* "children of the forest"

(young children who live in the forest), half-races (mixed elves/dwarves, human/dwarves, human/elves) and wild men (humans who have gone mad

from being seperated from the collective and have grown feral and violent) respectively.

should be an older race than the 3 highborne, perhaps even two. This/these races should be remnants of the original humanoids that lived on

the planet before the elves, dwarves and humans came.

We discover more about the adventurers who are a group of lowborne. A hobbit warrior, halfling mage, and an orc paladin. They meet a half-elf cleric who possesses memories of the humans and elves. He has unusual abilities and is a little bit mad.

Chapter 6

The group reach the border and the cleric departs for human lands, to join the war effort - or rather to heal both sides.

Dwarven patrols discover the group and offer to escort them to the dwarven capital. They bring them to a train system that uses a vacuum tunnel to travel great distances really quickly.

We learn a little about dwarven technology and their culture.

Chapter 7

More dwarven culture, race's history and news of Eimear's sister.

Government leases 20% of each Golem army from each of the families. Families that complete campaign objectives are awarded additional Golems, families that do not, lose some. The greater the total army size of each family the more money it receives and the greater its prestige and power within the council becomes. Families can be created or destroyed in record time as even low-level families must contribute to their submitted objectives.

Chapter 8

Meeting with the Dwarven government. Explanation of Golem technology and its ancillary technologies. News from the Elven city by flying messenger (an elf transformed into a bird). Rumour's of Eimear's sister being sighted at the border/crossing-point into Human territory.

Chapter 9

Dwarven Golem Technology, its role within the Dwarven Feudal regime. Spherical balls, impervious to damage, able to roll around on its own.

Transforms into a humanoid form for more complex tasks or combat. Can be fired like cannonballs when used offensively. Most devastating infantry power in the known world. Most versatile ground force. Capable of naval engagements also. Complex tunnel systems for their movement.

They are capable of digging tunnels to any specific height. Uses nano-bots to create tools, naturally glow in the dark, possess some modicum of intelligence, self-awareness and sentience. By-product of a forgotten age. Ability to develop golems is long lost, but dwarven expeditions to find caches of golems are still on-going. Many feudal Lords acquired their powerbase by laying rights to a particularly large force of Golems. They maintain the backbone of the Dwarven military, production and culture.

Chapter 10

Secret research into the creation of golems. Dwarves consider it taboo, it is an ancient forgotten technology due to the power it grants.

Endless golems could only lead to unending civil war. Civilian casualties would be astronomical while military casualties would be non-

existent.

Touch on dwarven sedentry, end of the Dwarven golden age, decline in their power. Dwarves still maintain the greatest organised army and navy force. Elves fight dirty, in guerilla warfare and superb ambushes due to superior scouting information.

Chapter 11

Negotiations between Eimear and the Dwarven government about going to war against the humans. A tenuous pact exists between Dwarves and the Elves, only in so much as solid borders. The human borders fluctuate regularly, so the dwarves have begun constructing a massive wall. It is incomplete, as a large valley still offers unsecured access.

Chapter 12

Those who speak don't know, those who know don't speak.

Chapter 13

Leaving the dwarven capital, Eimear offers her guards for Irkuin's protection as he goes to the frontlines for the war with the humans. We learn about the dwarven navy, ship manufacturing and the dwarven feudal lord system.

Chapter 14

Irkuin and Eimear are trapped across enemy lines and are surrounded. The humans greet Irkuin as an old friend and offer to bring him to the Queen. They bring Eimear too, as they say someone else is waiting to meet her (her sister).

Chapter 15

Meeting the queen and Eimear's sister, we discover greater insight into the humans abilities. Matriarchs of the tribe would save memory and create new genes which would then pass on their racial memory to the next generation. Memory could be transmitted through touch, but the Matriarch functioned as a server for all memories. Wirelessly backing-up any new experiences. Their orb allowed all members of the race to wirelessly transmit all memories to the Matriarch.

Chapter 16

The queen explains how their society has been scarred by the loss of their orb. They are a dying race, mutilated and enraged. It is all she can do to calm her people, to keep them from killing one another.

Tared is born of the Queen of the Elves, Bose, Eimear is born of Allafar; his flower.

Book 2: The Covenant of Serenity.

Original heroes from the first book are deposed. Feeling depressed for not being able to conquer their enemy or negotiate the peace at the end of the first book, but instead being rendered superfluous due to Irkuin's involvement. We watch their experiences in this new world where the Tarma'dens and elves live together resulting in a new power sharing structure which throws off the Dwarf race. While trying to maintain

diplomatic ties they turn to Irkuin who is still a hero to all their people having averted a world war and creating the peace by advising the Tarma'dens and elves to live together and share an orb. While being honoured Irkuin is asked if there is anything he needs. He requests they work harder to unite all their peoples in peace but he is also having visions of his home, an island to the south of the main continent.

He leads an exploration team there, which sets sail from the Tarma'den's city to explore. They discover the other orb which has been returned to what appears to be its original home. Having learned to survive for months without their orbs by forming a unity of the races. The telepathic energy of the Tarma'den race, focused could be used as a power source for the Dwarven cities and machinery. The Elves could then use the Dwarf power sources to aid their symbiotic processes with nature. The task of powering the Dwarven cities forced the Tarma'dens to unite their minds in a single task and thus create a unity of minds that could not exist otherwise.

By working together they are able to survive without their orbs and agree to move them to their original location. They return the Orbs to the island by building huge ships and spending months moving the first Orb from the Elven city to the south, to a Dwarf city on the coast and from the main Dwarven cities to the east to meet up.

The mulching, chopping down the oldest Bauben and recycling their organic/wooden forms to renew existing Bauben. Perhaps unnecessary now that three orbs are available for the forest.

The Teuben are the elves who refuse to go into bauben. They eventually go mad and feral.

The humans singing to the trees/Bauben

“The problem is loneliness. Elves live solitary lives, it's true. Hunters hunt for days, weeks, months without contact beyond the wilderness. Merchants travel the length and breadth of the forest without so much as a conversation with anyone other than their aspect. Yet, ultimately, we are social creatures. Maybe even more so than the Humans. We return to family. We speak to family. We've built our lives in the very forests of our forebearers. The forest itself IS our family. The Bauben become more and more withdrawn with each season, until finally their voices quiet and they become just another tree. The Humans... They sing to one another. As an Elf you can't hear it, as a Bauben... it is beautiful.”

The great healing helps the elves live even longer lives and ultimately, allow them to increase their population as individual elves have more birthing cycles. (Elves only give birth during their Bauben cycle.

Teuben become less frequent as becoming Bauben is less the slow death that people feared and more the intended renewing of minds and bodies.

Elves live and breathe as a community. We share dinner,

Creation of new super city like Gurren Lagann
Beginning of second war with "anti-?"

Book 3: The Greenhorne Cometh.

Indeed, we would be lying if we tried to convince it there weren't others who could intervene. In fact, the others are more qualified, better positioned, superbly learned and exquisitely prevented from becoming involved. We do find it amusing to watch it struggle against the tide.

It's nature compels it to try, even in the face of its own limitations. A humourous flaw - if nothing else, this should prove entertaining.

We never specified any rules to its purpose, only a few guidelines. Be nurturing but not smotheringly so. Posses a tempered wisdom, seconded only to ourselves.

Aspects

Rockspear Eagle – Eimear, her father Allafar. Extremely rare, agile, ferocious fighters, quick wit, patient, observant.

Tragenkatz - Giant werewolf creatures, akin to earth werewolves on steroids. Fast, incredibly strong, emotionless killing machines. Redeemed with the introduction of human's to elven lands.

Panzerkatz – No specific size is the norm, can be large or tiny. Possess a shell on their back that covers a significant portion of their bodies. Can withdraw within their shells. Typically healers, patient, kind, gentle, generous.

Suns

First sun - Lothar

Second sun - Anther

Third sun - Trither

Moons

First moon -

Second moon -

Third moon -

Fourth moon -

Fifth moon -

Sixth moon -

Seventh moon -

Eighth moon -

Ninth moon -