

## **Book I: Everterra**

### **Prologue**

Everterra is a land shaped by possibility and ruin in equal measure.

Its vastness resists comprehension, reaching from restless seas and ancient forests to sun-scorched deserts and places deliberately erased from memory. Across its long history, civilizations have risen, fractured, and vanished, leaving behind ruins half-buried by time and stories worn thin by retelling.

Our story begins in an age not yet forgotten.

It is called the Age of Men.

Once, the peoples of Everterra lived without great war. Conflict existed, as it always does, but it was contained—border skirmishes, rival claims, ambitions checked by balance rather than conquest. The races of the land lived alongside one another in uneasy tolerance, bound by custom, distance, and necessity.

That balance ended with the rise of a human king.

His name was Canaan.

At first, his ascent drew little notice. He emerged quietly, consolidating control over the southeastern reaches of Everterra through favors, bargains, and the convenient removal of those who resisted him. Many believed his rivals died by chance or misfortune. No proof ever surfaced to suggest otherwise.

By the time his intentions became visible, it was already too late.

Canaan ruled from Mount Canaan, a fortified metropolis that became both symbol and engine of his authority. In public, he was measured, charismatic, generous in speech. Behind closed doors, he ruled with precision and cruelty, reshaping the land through forceful diplomacy, bribery, and fear.

Lords who pledged allegiance were rewarded with titles, protection, and status. Those who did not vanish. Armies followed, not always by loyalty, but by necessity. Rank was offered freely to any able-bodied man willing to fight beneath his banner. Wealth was promised. Order was enforced.

Within five years, the South-Eastern Domain fell.

Within thirty, the majority of human civilization stood beneath his rule.

Canaan did not immediately wage war on the elder races. He did not need to. His power spread through infrastructure rather than invasion—fortresses raised at strategic crossings, castles converted into labor camps, cities transformed into supply chains feeding his war machine.

Prisoners were not executed.

They were repurposed.

Among the many compounds erected during this expansion, one inspired fear beyond all others.

The Ninth Gate.

Built against the northern edge of the Dark Forest, pressed close to the impassable icebound

mountains that marked the end of Everterra, the Ninth Gate was both prison and warning. It housed political dissidents, criminals, and the inconvenient—those who could not be allowed to exist freely but were still useful.

The Ninth Gate was never meant to be lived in.

It was meant to be endured.

And it is there that our story truly begins.