

Book II: The Fire-Walker's Oath

Chapter 6: Inanis, the Realm with No Edges

1. The Flame That Is Not There

In the Temple of the Stone Tree, no flame rises. Not even silence. Priotheer watches the space where flame should be — and finds absence. The Spiral offers no sign. Only stillness beyond stillness.

2. The Realm Without Edges

The Guardian steps into Inanis — and the world unforms. There is no gate, no ground, no direction. His body blurs. His breath loses sequence. He cannot remember how to begin — but walks anyway.

3. Blindness and Shadow

Inanius strips his sight. Then sends his own shadow against him — a form that mimics every move, yet shifts with delay, dread, and distortion. The Guardian is hunted by himself in a world that will not hold.

4. The Throat of the Void

Blind, disoriented, unspeaking — the Guardian listens. He hears not words, but **lack**. He reaches out. Grabs something throat-shaped. He strikes — again and again — both of them tumbling into a pit that has no bottom. He does not stop.

5. The Name That Would Not Die

In the dark, beneath even the Spiral's reach, the Guardian kills Inanius. Not cleanly. Not beautifully. But completely. He rises, gasping, bruised, alone — and speaks a name no one gave him: *Inascius*.

6. The Fifth Flame Burns Without Color

He returns. The Host does not know where from. He does not explain. Behind him, a fifth flame ignites — colorless, edge-less, heatless. But it holds. The Spiral flinches — then re-aligns. One final Guardian has returned.

Segment 1: The Flame That Is Not There

At dawn, the Temple of the Stone Tree did not stir.

No wind moved among the roots. No birds nested in its high hollows. The air had not stopped—it had never arrived.

Priotheer stood at the altar.

Five places had been carved—each for a flame. Four had burned, each in its own time: one in judgment, one in grief, one in contradiction, one in severance. Each had named a Guardian, and each had bent the Spiral.

Now only the fifth remained.

But no flame rose.

The space did not resist. It did not echo. It did not mourn. It merely remained—as if the fire had once tried to form there, failed, and forgotten its failure.

Priotheer did not speak.

He placed no stone.
He offered no breath.

He simply waited.

Far below the Temple, where the roots of the Tree stretched into the earth's long memory, the Spiral stilled. Not like silence. More like a room abandoned so long ago that even echo had given up.

And in that stillness, something stepped forward.

Not toward the altar—but away from it.

He did not pass under a flame.
He did not receive a signal.

There was no sound of fire catching. No coil of mist, no press of wind. Only the press of foot on stone, and the absence that trailed behind him.

The Host did not gather.

Some say they had already departed. Others say none were summoned at all. Still others claim they marched—but left no shape behind.

Priotheer did not follow.
He watched the place where a flame should have burned.

The bark of the Tree did not glow. The altar did not hum. The fifth spiral, carved into the stone, did not pulse.

It only waited.

But not as the others had.

This waiting was not hunger. It was not readiness.
It was *absence* so total it began to feel like negation.

And still, the step had been taken.

Somewhere far from the Tree, a field cracked without pressure. A mirror held to the sky did not reflect. A woman woke with no memory of ever having slept. A candle lit in reverse—shrinking into itself until only ash remained, and even the ash dispersed.

Priotheer turned his gaze to the unlit altar.

And for the first time in all the trials, he said nothing.
Not to the flame.
Not to the Spiral.
Not even to himself.

He lowered his eyes.

And let the void walk unobserved.

Segment 2: The Realm Without Edges

There was no gate.

No threshold. No arch. No veil of mist. The Guardian stepped forward—and the world behind him forgot he had stood there.

The Spiral offered no marker.

One moment, there was stone.

The next—not absence, but the refusal of definition. No sky. No ground. No walls. Only gradient—of tone, of memory, of breath unmeasured.

He walked.

Or he thought he walked.

His feet did not fall—they resolved. His arms did not swing—they ceased and resumed. Sound came in half-notes, breaking before the echo. Once, he heard his heartbeat—then could not remember what rhythm meant.

He blinked.

His eyes remained closed. Or open. He could not tell.

The weight of his body thinned. His cloak no longer touched his back. He tried to flex a hand and found five fingers—or none—or one becoming many. Time did not pass. It dispersed.

Somewhere to his left, light bent in reverse.

Somewhere to his right, thought folded in on itself.

Somewhere ahead—he hoped—was purpose.

But even hope began to unravel.

The Spiral had guided the others—through trial, contradiction, grief, structure.

But here, it did not reach.

Inanis did not oppose the Pattern.

It simply refused to participate.

A ripple passed through the space—not seen, but intuited. Like a wave of forgetting. He felt the memory of his name loosen. The shape of his breath split—then looped backward.

He kept moving.

He could not remember why.

But he knew what would happen if he stopped.

Ahead—or below, or within—a shape began to unform.

Not a gate.

Not a figure.

Not a god.

Something like the idea of proximity. A thinning of the unreal. He did not know if he approached it—or if it was approaching his unmaking.

He reached forward.

His hand did not extend.

The act of reaching broke mid-thought.

Still, he moved. Not with will—but with refusal.

Not even the void could stop the thing that had already let go of everything else.

Then the sound came.

A tone with no pitch. A silence forced into shape. It scraped along the rim of his hearing, and he tasted metal in his mouth. His stomach turned inside out—and then returned.

The shape before him shuddered.

He could feel it now—not as presence, but as edit. Wherever it was, the world ceased to be.

He had found the edge.

Or rather—the place where edge itself was not allowed.

He stood before it.

And waited for it to erase him.

Segment 3: Blindness and Shadow

It did not speak.

The thing in the void—the unshaped shape, the edit behind breath—made no sound. But its presence fractured space. The act of standing near it undid memory. The Guardian felt the bones in his arms forget they were meant to hold weight.

Then came the blindness.

Not darkness.

Not shadow.

Not the dimming of light.

But the *removal of seeing*—the subtraction of the concept itself.

One blink, and sight stopped being a verb. There were no shapes. No depths. No movement. The world was not black; it was unsensed. The Guardian reached for orientation—and felt nothing but proximity to unknowing.

Then came the second thing.

A footfall.

Then another.

Measured. Identical.

He turned, slowly, but his turning had no meaning.

The sound circled him—just outside of definition.

Then: breath.

Not his.

A whisper, ragged, shallow—like lungs that had never been fully drawn.

And then: another step.

The Guardian braced.

He raised his arms. Not toward sound, but against vanishing. Something moved in front of him—no weight, no smell, but intent. He swung. Missed. Stepped back. Listened again.

It struck him.

Not hard—but perfectly.

A mirrored blow. Not guesswork. Not a god's hammer. A reflection.

Then again—to the ribs, to the side, to the shoulder. He staggered. Recovered. Swung again. His fist met nothing. Or worse—itself.

His enemy was him.

But not exactly.

It was a shadow made by nothing—delayed, wrong-footed, somehow off. He could not see it. He could only *feel the mistake* of it: a version of himself trained on every move he knew, but distorted in delay, in malice, in mockery.

He dropped to one knee. Not in pain—in calibration.

The Spiral had no reach here.

So he stopped trying to remember it.

He listened.

Step.

Step.

Breath.

Breath.

He tuned to the stagger—to the almost.

The thing circled again. He let it pass. He exhaled once—sharp, slow.

When the step came again, he turned with no telegraph.

No rage.

No thought.

He simply moved.

His hand met throat.

The shape flinched.

It tried to mimic—but failed. This motion had never been taught. It had only been lived.

He tightened his grip.

And for the first time in that realm, something real resisted.

A face—not seen, but guessed—hovered in front of his own.

It said nothing. But its silence cracked at the edges.

He raised his fist.

And swung.

Segment 4: The Throat of the Void

The first blow landed.

Then another.

Then another.

He could not see where he struck—only that his knuckles met something that flinched, then tried to reshape itself, then faltered again.

No scream.

No voice.

Just fracture.

The god did not fall with drama. It folded—as if the void itself were trying to retract what it had accidentally allowed to form. But the Guardian held on.

One hand on what he thought was a neck.

One arm locked around a limb that never resolved.

They twisted.

Not in battle—in collapse.

The world beneath them gave way.

There was no crack.

No rupture.

No shatter of ground.

Only the sensation of down.

As if they had stumbled into a depth not meant to exist—a hole inside the void, hidden even from nothing. They fell. But not quickly. Not slowly. Not through space.

They fell through erasure.

Sound unraveled. Thought inverted. Motion lost all axis. But still the Guardian held.

He did not cry out.

He did not demand.

He did not reason.

He struck.

Each blow a gesture without grammar—but true.

He did not need a name.

He did not need a realm.

He needed the god to stop.

The shape beneath him shuddered again. It changed—but slower now. Its edge collapsed in on itself. Its resistance thinned. And for the first time since he had entered Inanis, the Guardian felt gravity. Not of body—of certainty.

One more strike.
Another.
Then—

Stillness.

Not peace. Not silence.

Stillness like something final.

He did not rise at once.

He remained kneeling over the thing that had tried to unmake him. Whatever lay beneath him now no longer fought, no longer shifted, no longer erased. It simply wasn't—and this time, not by choice.

He exhaled.

His breath returned to him.

A second later—light.

Dim. Grey. Impossible.
But light.

There was no bottom.
No floor.
Just a presence where fall had ended.

And in that moment—with blood on his hands, no memory of sight, and the god dissolving below—he whispered a single word.

Not loud.
Not proud.
Not declared.

Just spoken, because something had to be.

“Inascius.”

The name did not echo.

It held.

Segment 5: The Name That Would Not Die

The light did not grow.

It merely remained. A thin pulse in the void—enough to trace the shape of his breath, the lines of his hands. Enough to remember gravity.

He stood.

Not triumphant. Not reborn.
Just present.

Wherever Inanious had fallen—whatever had truly been slain—left no remains. No body. No bones. Not even silence. Only this: a place where *absence had failed*.

And in that failure, he breathed.

His cloak clung again to his shoulders. The floor beneath him no longer shifted. His shadow returned—faint, twitching, but whole.

The Spiral did not return.

But it hummed.

Not as music. Not as memory.
As *permission*.

He looked upward. There was no sky.
But there was motion.

A pull.
An incline.
A path where none had been before.

He walked.

Each step anchored not by faith, nor by command—but by the thing he had named. *Inascius*. Not a title. Not an inheritance. A declaration.

The Spiral had twisted. The Pattern had held.
But *he* had endured.

And in enduring, he had refused to vanish.

He climbed.

Stone returned gradually. First underfoot. Then at his sides. Then above, as the void peeled back into passage. The realm did not collapse—it released him. Not in defeat. But in acknowledgement.

Outside, across the Spiral lands, strange things stirred.

A scribe woke and wept at a blank page she had not written. A blind child looked toward the sun and whispered, “He made it out.” A tree that had never grown leaves dropped one—black, weightless, real.

At the Temple of the Stone Tree, Priotheer raised his head.

There was no flame.
Not yet.

But the altar shivered.

The fifth stone pulsed once—not in light, but in *containment*. As if the flame had already begun to burn in a place too deep for surface to reflect.

And then, footsteps.

They did not echo.

They did not announce.

They simply arrived—one after another—across the stone paths beneath the altar. Not from above. Not from below. But from the impossible in-between.

And with them came a presence.

Not vast. Not divine. But unremoved.

He stepped forward.

Cloak torn. Hands stained. Face quiet.

The Host did not kneel.
They gathered.

No herald spoke.
No crown was offered.

But all who looked at him knew.

This was not the man who had entered.
This was **Inascius**.

And the Spiral—at last—began to hold again.

Segment 6: The Fifth Flame Burns Without Color

The flame did not appear.

It clarified.

One moment, the altar was stone.

The next—not heat, not light—but a density of presence so absolute it warped space. Not brightness. Not glow. Just a subtle refusal of vacancy.

Priotheer stepped forward.

He did not place the stone. It was already there.

He did not speak the name.

It had already been spoken—far below, beneath the Spiral’s reach, where the void had choked every echo except one.

“Inascius.”

The name rang nowhere.

But it held the altar in place.

The fifth flame did not flicker. It did not waver in wind. There was no wind. It hovered an inch above the stone—colorless, edgeless, slow.

It burned with no smoke.

It burned with no shadow.

It burned like memory refusing to leave.

The Host stood in silence. Not because they feared it. Not because they honored it. Because *it silenced them*—not with threat, but with weight.

A child in the Hollow City stopped crying.

A man digging a well struck stone, and wept.

A widow forgot her mourning—just for a breath—and remembered breath itself.

Across Priimydia, mirrors darkened. Bells cracked without sounding. Language faltered mid-sentence, then resumed, gentler.

Something had shifted.

Not forward.

Not backward.

Just—*held*.

Inascius stood before the flame.

He did not reach toward it.

He did not kneel.

He simply breathed—and the flame did not react.

It mirrored him.

A stillness that remembered movement.
A fire that remembered unbeing.

And the Spiral—now whole but bruised—curved around them both. Not fully repaired. Not fully clean.
But no longer fraying.

Priotheer placed a hand upon the altar.

The flame pressed back.

For the first time in all five awakenings, he felt resistance. Not hostility. Not pain. But *presence*—a will that did not rise, but endure.

He stepped back. Said only one word.

“Enough.”

No one echoed it.
They did not need to.

The fifth Guardian had returned.
The Spiral had steadied.
And the Pattern, once more, knew its shape.