At the beginning of all time, before the creation of the earth, before the sun and moon, before animals and before people, there was only the eternal Nerromiktok, blessed be the name. They existed of the earth and through it. They existed in all space and time, forward to the end and backward to the beginning. They were all things, and all possibilities. Throughout themselves, Nerromiktok thought and wondered, pondered and meditated on all things. And the universe lay like this for an eternity; Nerromiktok in thought, and the world at rest, in a state of unmake.

However, after this eternity, Nerromiktok finally ceased his infinite thought, and looking at himself, decide to split himself into light and dark. Through the creation of the two, there would be a dynamism, a movement, and an ebb and flow to the world. Dark and Light now looked at one another and were satisfied. And so they danced.

They danced, swirling among themselves, reveling in their difference, endlessly curious about the otherness of their opposite. They weaved and flowed through the universe. All things were now Two. And varied between the two; back and forth, another eternity lasted in this state.

However, after this eternity, Light finally ceased its infinite dance, and looking at itself, decided to split itself, not into two, but into a million pieces. And so it did, and from Light the world came into being: the trees, the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and all animals and finally men as well.

Dark looked at these new things and was confused. There was no one to dance with any longer.

Dark shifted. Dark ebbed, and flowed. Dark searched and spun, looking all throughout the new universe. And the early men, and the early animals, and the sun and the moon all shrunk from the other. They did not remember the dance. They did not remember the Duality hat had been forever, just as Dark had forgotten itself Nerromiktok.

And they were fearful of Dark. They were fearful of the lack of light. To them, looking inwards, the universe was them. The universe was light, and so, they were fearful of that which was not themselves. They were fearful of the other.

One day, darkness came to the animals and the humans. In their terror, they reached inside themselves, drawing from them the light that they themselves were, and from this self-light they pulled taliq, the soul-flame.

In it was the heart of the original light, undampened by any lesser dark, hidden by no object. It shone through the word and the world was brightened by it. And Dark remembered Light. Dark saw the taliq and rejoiced. There before it was the partner with which it once danced. Yet Dark did not leave, for Dark was as of the universe as Light. And in making taliq, the animals and man had diminished themselves.

An uneasy existence for the remains of Light: man clung to life, forever perpetuating the taliq to hold back Dark, yet knowing that it was a precarious balance. The application of self was instrumental, and necessary, not simply for a season, or even for a lifetime, but for all seasons. And thus man lived, and laughed, and hunted and built and died, yet through it all must keep the taliq. To stop was to allow the darkness within, and all they had made would be caught in the dance.

It was in this time that Issumatar was born.

Issumatar lived far to the north. His tribe lay past the most inaccessible passes, further than the last great river, past the frozen marshes in a place where the land was cold and the sap needle trees lay burdened with snow. The tribe was so far north that right before their village lay the great folds of taliq, and beyond that, the darkness (for they did not know of Dark, merely darkness)

And Issumatar was born. His name meant Superior for he cried with a mighty roar at his birth. And through his life he was of his name, performing great feats of strength, daring and courage. So, when it came to his coming of age, the elders took him to the clearing in the twisted scatter-trees, where it was too cold for snow to fall, and the world was frozen and lifeless. They pointed to the north, and from the clearing, Issumatar could see the great taliq. And in this moment of wonder, they proclaimed him Ataneq, Champion.

The year was a blur for the new Ataneq. The training was fierce and unrelenting. The elder warriors, the great men of the tribe pushed him to his limits, past even feats that they themselves were able to accomplish. He must, after all, battle singlehandled with the darkness that lay beyond the taliq. The elder women challenged him in feats of the mind, assaulting him with puzzles of horrible complexity whose answers twisted and squirmed before the mind. He must, after all, see through with clarity, the deceptions of the darkness that was his foe.

And the men and women and children all labored hard in that year to create the gifts that he would take with him into the darkness past the taliq. From all ways of life, these gifts were made: crafts of strongest iron and hides of the toughest beast skin, sigil talisman of lesser taliq, clothing of the warmest furs, a spear taken from the very core wood of his name-tree.

And the labors of the year, the hunt and harvest, his training and the flow of life all passed before the march of time. And before too long, the full year had passed. It was the time of the Ataneq.

Issumatar knelt as the memebers of the village came before him, depositing their fine gifts beside him. He shone brightly at each one in turn, and gave a few words to each of the craftsmen. However, there was one craft in particular, and its owner that he was interested in above all others.

Panik at long last came before him. She wore simple clothes, but such simplicity belied a subtle grace. She approached Issumatar holding something in her hands. She made no noise, her slippers silent against the snow before his appointed place. He hair was black as the darkest night, and shone with the torchlight. Her face and hands were smooth and kind.

Panik approached Issumatar and held forth her gift. “Ataneq, I give this freely.” She entoned, speaking the customary words. She did not look up at him, not yet.

He leaned forward and received her gift, but in doing so, he clasped her hands in his.

He her make a small noise, and she looked up at him.

“It is an amulet.” She said with a smile, gesturing down at the item in their hands.

He looked down. In their hands was a beautifully carved wooden bead necklace. Each of the beads had on it a different word of power, to remind the wearer the strength of taliq. At the end of the necklace was a white gem. Multifaceted, it absorbed the yellow torchlight and radiated back out in pure reflection.

Issumatar gasped. It was astonishing. It shone with a brilliance quite out of factor with anything he had been given so far, and it radiated with a light that could have only been made from the deepest true taliq.

“I don't know how to repay such a thing.” He stammered, deviating from the ceremony.

The elders behind him frowned.

But Panik straightened herself, gently freeing her hands from his. “It is freely given, Ataneq. May it light your path in the darkness.” She bowed before him, and then slipped away before he had a chance to respond. His heart beat heavy in his chest, and he did not remember the rest of the ceremony, so taken was he with the gift.

But the day was short, for it was still in the late winter days, and snow yet lay on the ground. It was already the day of Ataneq.

The whole tribe turned out; the ceremony was one of the most important of the entire year. He stood before them, bedecked with all the gifts they had given him the day earlier. The elders said their piece. He said a few words. A handful of people of the village gave him encouragement, or expressed their gratitude. Yet through it all, his eyes were locked with Panik. He longed to run to her, to cast off his gifts, save for the brilliant necklace, and wrap her in his arms.

But such a thing would be unthinkable. He was Ataneq. He was chosen. And all too soon, it was time for him to step through the pulsating folds of taliq.

The village walked with him, the elders beside him. When they came to the same clearing, the tribe stopped. He looked at Panik one last time then continued with the elders towards taliq.

He looked at the elders around him and then at taliq, and then at the gifts in his hands, the weapons, the jewelery, the armor, the boots, and of course the necklace. Slowly, he began to regret his decision.

But it was far too late. The small ceremony before the taliq was far too quick for him to completely change his mind, and when the last of the wild dancing before the fire they had constructed was over, the elders performed the last ritual from which taliq flowed, and the arms of the barrier opened for him.

Darkness loomed in front of him.

He hesitated, he looked to the elders, brilliant gem in his hands. They nodded to him and gestured towards the opening. And he stepped through.