

# I. Zanitlasnadzazani

## **On the coming of the Ancients to Zhdant, the creation of the world and the origin of the Shining Ones.**

Long ago, when the world was young, Zhdant was but a vast and barren expanse, devoid of life and light. The waters of its oceans roared in endless fury, the winds howled in untamed rage, and the lands were little more than craggy stones and the hollow echoes of the deep. In those days, before the first step of time could mark its path across the ages, the world was dark—save for one light, distant but constant, that shone above the empty realm.

This light was known as Pliebrzhdieni, the Lord of Light and Life, and it was the only thing that brought any semblance of warmth to the cold expanse. Pliebrzhdieni had no rival, no companion; it was solitary in its splendor, and from it, all that was life and light upon Zhdant emerged. Yet the loneliness of the Lord of Light weighed heavy upon the vast firmament, and even the brilliance of its radiance could not quell the longing that stirred within the celestial heart.

And so it was that the Ancient Ones, the Zanitlasnad, came to Zhdant. They were travelers of the heavens, beings of ancient wisdom and untold power, who had wandered the cosmos in search of a place to settle, a refuge from the unknown perils of the void. When they arrived upon the barren lands of Zhdant, they saw that it was a world rich with untapped potential, a place that might one day become a sanctuary for all creation.

With their vast knowledge, the Zanitlasnad began their work. They shaped the earth, sowed the seas, and placed the stars upon the velvet sky, each according to their design. From their hands sprang forth many wondrous creatures, both great and small, some for sustenance, others for companionship, and others still to serve the will of the Zanitlasnad. But among all their creations, there was one in particular that caught the attention of the wise ones.

The Zanitlasnad, in their boundless creativity, had created many forms of servants, vassals, and slaves, but among them, one kind arose to surpass the others. These were the Zhodani, the Shining Ones, whose minds were quick and whose hearts burned with the brilliance of the stars. They grew in stature and intellect, and the Zanitlasnad recognized that they were no ordinary creations. These beings, more akin to their makers than to mere slaves, were gifted with understanding and purpose. And so, the Zhodani were raised to a higher place, for they were the chosen of the Zanitlasnad.

In that time, the world of Zhdant knew only one light in the heavens, and it

was Pliebrzhdieni, the Lord of Light and Life. Yet, the Zanitlasnad, ever wise, saw that the heavens were incomplete, for Pliebrzhdieni, however radiant and mighty, stood alone. And so, they turned their craft to the heavens once more. Through many great works, they caused another light to appear in the sky, a light of a different nature. This new light was not constant like Pliebrzhdieni, but fickle and elusive. It shone only in brief moments, its radiance often hidden by the shadow of clouds, leaving the earth in darkness.

This light was known to the Zhodani as Viepchaklzhdieni, the Light that Fades. It was also called the Lord of Waters, for when it shone faintly in the sky, the seas would rise in great fury, thrashing against the shores in a tempest of dark waves. The seas were the domain of Viepchaklzhdieni, and when the light was dim, the waters would grow fierce and angry. But when the light returned to its fullest, calm would descend upon the world, and the land would rest.

The marriage of these two lights—Pliebrzhdieni, the Lord of Light and Life, and Viepchaklzhdieni, the Light that Fades—was a time of great tumult upon Zhdant. The seas swelled with anger, and the lands shook with great tremors. Mountains were torn asunder, rivers were redirected, and cities that the Zanitlasnad had built were laid to ruin beneath the fury of the waters and the quaking earth. For the union of Pliebrzhdieni and Viepchaklzhdieni was no peaceful one; it was a marriage of contrasts, and these contrasts waged war upon the world.

The wrath of Viepchaklzhdieni was great, for he harbored envy toward Pliebrzhdieni, whose light was eternal and unyielding. Viepchaklzhdieni, the Light that Fades, often sought to hide the radiance of Pliebrzhdieni from the world, plunging Zhdant into darkness, so that all might feel the emptiness that came with the passing of the light. But though Viepchaklzhdieni's shadow could dim the brilliance of the Greater Light, it could not keep it hidden forever. For the Greater Light, Pliebrzhdieni, always returned, bringing with it the warmth and life that all upon Zhdant relied upon. The wrath of Viepchaklzhdieni would pass as quickly as it had come, but the scars of that tumultuous time remained.

And from their union, four children were born. These were not ordinary children, but beings of immense power and purpose, each with dominion over great aspects of Zhdant's creation. Their names were known throughout the ages, and they would come to shape the world in ways both wondrous and terrible.

The firstborn was Adrablsish, the fleetest of the children, who became the messenger and herald of the gods. Swift as the winds themselves, Adrablsish traveled from one end of the world to the other, carrying the word of the gods to all corners of Zhdant. His wings were the light of dawn, and wherever he went, the hearts of the people quickened with hope.

The secondborn was Pliantshotl, the herald of war and conquest. Strong and unyielding, Pliantshotl wielded the power of the storm, and where he went, the land trembled beneath the weight of his might. His cry echoed across the battlefield, calling forth the forces of war and bringing both glory and ruin in his wake.

The thirdborn was Brovlekal, the Lord of Winds. His breath was the wind that swept across the seas and fields, carrying with it both the fragrance of

flowers and the roar of the tempest. Brovlekal's moods were as fickle as the weather, and when he was angry, the winds howled like the cries of a thousand lost souls. But when he was content, the winds would sing with the melodies of the earth, carrying peace to the people of Zhdant.

The youngest was Emkachdraf, whose dominion was death and rebirth. Emkachdraf was both a harbinger of endings and a promise of new beginnings. Where death took its toll, Emkachdraf would be there, ushering in the cycle of life once more. Emkachdraf's hands were gentle but firm, for they held the power to both destroy and renew, to lay waste to the old and bring forth the new.

These four children were not alone in their power. From them came countless grandchildren, the Dlemstaitz Tsiaqr, the wandering marauders who lit the skies with their capricious moods. These beings were wild and unpredictable, flashing across the heavens like shooting stars, their deeds both feared and admired by the peoples of Zhdant.

Yet even as the gods wrought their great works upon Zhdant, the Zanitlasnad did not falter. They had seen the tumultuousness of the union of Pliebrzhdieni and Viepchaklzhdieni, and though the world had been shaken, they did not despair. With their servants, the Zhodani, the Ancient Ones set about rebuilding their cities, restoring their wonders, and reclaiming the glory of their time.

After an age of toil and rebirth, the greatest of the Zanitlasnad raised up a great city in their honor, a city that would stand as a testament to their strength and resilience. This city was called Zhdantpreql, the City of Perilous Refuge. It was a place of grandeur, with spires that touched the heavens and streets that shimmered with the light of a thousand stars. The people of Zhdant, both Zhodani and their allies, gathered in this city to celebrate the peace and harmony that had returned to the land.

And thus, for an age, the Zanitlasnad ruled Zhdant, and the world knew peace. The Zhdant became known by another name—the Land of the Gods—where the gods walked among mortals and breathed life into the world. It was a time of great prosperity, and the people lived in harmony with the forces that had shaped their world.

But in time, as all things must, the age of the Zanitlasnad passed, and Zhdant entered a new chapter. Yet even as the gods withdrew, their mark remained upon the world, and the light of Pliebrzhdieni and Viepchaklzhdieni continued to shine upon the land. And so, the tale of Zhdant, the Perilous Refuge, lives on, carried in the songs and stories of the people, for the world of Zhdant is ever-changing, and the gods still watch over it from the stars above.