

SECRETS: Part 1

By L.Blair

Just outside the city massive Kuji trees line the horizon in every direction, for natives it's a strange albeit beautiful sight to be seen. Their green, blue and pink incandescent leaves decorate deep black branches that twist, turn, and intertwine in all directions in search of the sun's embrace. As if covered entirely in a thin layer of warm oil, they reflect light and object with a hypnotic prism effect. With hundreds of square miles of Kuji forest grown in a year the origins of the alien plant and forest remain unknown 15 years later. With suspicion many theories exist but it is largely agreed the forest is serving its purpose of hiding secrets with great effect.

Furthest from the city in a cleared field 200 of the cities young men and women stand shoulder to shoulder impatiently waiting for instruction under a clear sky and blistering sun. Over chatter and groans the mere mention of rain brings a bittersweet tension to the air. Sweaty, heavy breathing Nila stands at the very center of the group, "it hasn't rained here in 4 years, whomever said that is an idiot," she angrily mumbles to those within an ear's distance. "Shut up and kneel," a loud voice abruptly interrupts. The entire group drops down without hesitation and without word revealing three men standing over and closely to the group. Nila among the first to do so fights to hide her excitement. With the back of her hand she wipes the sweat from her brow, a slightly sinister grin remains. In that moment a strikingly large young man gently nudges her right arm in approval she shifts position to remain balanced, the sinister grin undisturbed. Now visible the man standing center continued "You there, stand up and step forward" to many in the groups and Nila's surprise a young boy took his place next to the three men.

"Welcome to Foundation week, look around, you stand next to 199 of Sapphire cities most talented and powerful Afunah," the voice said this time with the warm tone of a loving father. A visible sigh of relief sweeps the entire group, silent joy expressed in shy smiles, handshakes and macho half hugs. A distance voice called for the boy, he silently and quickly ran out of view. The man, an unfamiliar face to Nila continued "As many of you may know we are headed towards uncertain times," with that said the quiet celebration ended as abruptly as it began.