

THE DRAGON STAR

An Epic Sword and Sorcery Opera

Episode One

"The Fugitives"

Written by

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Adapted from the novel
The Dragon Star by G.L. BREEDON

TEASER

EXT. TANSHEN FOREST - NIGHT

Dappled light from the sister moons -- one large, one small -- falls through wide branches. Two sleeping figures lean against a tree.

LEE-NIN. Early 30s. SAO-TAUNA. Seven years old. Both with chestnut skin and vaguely Asian features. Finely made dresses. Ragged hems. Dirty faces.

TITLES: The Tanshen Dominion

Lee-Nin's eyes twitch -- dreaming.

EXT. TEMPLE RUINS - NIGHT (DREAM)

DREAM IMAGES BLEND TOGETHER:

Stars blaze in coal-black emptiness.

A new crimson star erupts. Brighter than all others.

Boots and bare feet tread the dust of a winding road.

Waves lap against barnacled hulls.

A rainbow rises over weathered temple stones.

A GODDESS stands atop a temple dais -- face indistinct.

GODDESS

I am the new goddess come to release
you.

The worshipers cheer.

EXT. TANSHEN FOREST - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Lee-Nin's eyes snap awake. She looks around. Panicked.

She turns her head to the sound of a breaking twig. Footsteps. Men's low voices. The soft snuffling of dogs with noses close to the ground.

She nudges the girl awake. Sao-Tauna opens her eyes.

LEE-NIN

The wardens are coming again.

She stands. Lifts Sao-Tauna. Holds the hem of her dress in one hand. The girl in the other arm. Picks her way quietly through the trees. Following a sound -- running water.

EXT. SIMPLE FARM - NIGHT

Steel bites into oak. A split log falls from a tree stump.

A man lowers an axe. SHA-KUTAN. Extremely large. Scarred face. Asian-Latino features. Mid 40s.

He looks across a moonlit field to the woods. Pensive.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

They come this way...
They cannot come here...
 They come this way, nonetheless...
What will we do...?
 We could hide...
Yes. Hide until they pass...

Sha-Kutan picks up the axe. Looks again at the trees.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

But why do they pursue the woman...?
We cannot become entangled...
 No. No, we must not become
 entangled...
We should hide...
 Yes. Conceal ourselves until they are
 gone...

Sha-Kutan walks toward a stand of trees opposite the field. He glances back. Past a small house and barn.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

And if they find us...?
Then we must pray...
 Yes. Pray we will not need to kill
 them...

Sha-Kutan disappears into the leaves. Axe on his shoulder.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. TANSHEN FOREST RIVER - NIGHT

Fabric floats on water. Lee-Nin holds Sao-Tauna as she traverses a river. Her dress billows behind her. They come to a large, flat rock covered in moss. She puts Sao-Tauna down. Climbs out of the river. They cross the moss. Up the rock. Into the woods again. Pause. Lee-Nin wrings water from her dress. Sao-Tauna looks up to her.

LEE-NIN

The river loaned us some time. With luck, we might lose them tonight.

Lee-Nin looks through the trees across the river.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

At least for a day or so. Maybe we can find a road. And a wagon to hitch a ride on in the morning.

She looks at the girl.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

I shouldn't have fallen asleep. I'm sorry. I had the dream people talk about.

(Pause.)

Do you have the dream?

Sao-Tauna nods.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

Hundreds in the palace had the dream before we left. They say thousands across the Iron Realm have it each night. That can't bode well.

Sao-Tauna takes her hand. They walk deeper into the woods. Shortly, they come to a field of barley. Across the field sits the small farmhouse and barn. Sao-Tauna points.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

Yes. I see. They might have food... Or coins.

A path leads through the field. They follow it to the farm.

EXT. SIMPLE FARM - NIGHT

Lee-Nin looks between the farmhouse and ramshackle barn.

LEE-NIN

Maybe they have a horse.

Lee-Nin releases Sao-Tauna's hand. Slowly...Quietly...Pulls open the barn door.

INT. BARN OF SMALL FARM - NIGHT

The light of the sister moons illuminates the interior of the barn. Three large pigs. A handful of chickens. A lean-looking goat. No horse. Lee-Nin closes the door.

EXT. SIMPLE FARM - NIGHT

Lee-Nin leads Sao-Tauna to the small farmhouse. They stand at the entrance. Listening. Lee-Nin gently opens the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Lee-Nin and Sao-Tauna stand in the doorway. Moonlight seeps in. The one-room house is empty. A long oak table. Cooking counter. Wooden food pantry. Cold fireplace. Empty bed in the corner. Wooden trunk beside the bed. Lee-Nin pulls Sao-Tauna inside. Closes the door.

Lee-Nin fumbles in the dark. A flint sparks. Flame leaps to life on the wick of an oil lamp.

LEE-NIN

Looks like a lone farmer lives here.
Wherever he is.

Lee-Nin spies a short stack of books on the table. A canvas bag on a chair. She grabs the bag. Goes to the pantry.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

We'll just take a little food. Enough to help us get by. Some dinbao. Some cheese.

Sao-Tauna cocks her head at Lee-Lin.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

I know it's stealing, but we ran out of coin to repay the farmer.

(MORE)

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

Maybe he has coin hidden. We'll only
take what we need.

Sao-Tauna frowns. Then nods. Lee-Nin fills the canvas sack.
Cheese. Dried meat. Root vegetables. Dinbao (flatbread).

Lee-Nin hands a scrap of dinbao to Sao-Tauna. She chews.

The thud of footsteps outside the door. Lee-Nin rushes to
Sao-Tauna. Looks at the table. A dull meat knife. Grabs it.
Holds it up as the door opens.

Sha-Kutan steps into the light. His shoulders fill the door
frame. He looks at Lee-Nin and Sao-Tauna. They stare back.

SHA-KUTAN

You should not be here.

Sha-Kutan lowers the axe. Steps inside. Closes the door.

EXT. TANSHEN FOREST RIVER - NIGHT

Boots stamp the sand of the riverbank. Dogs sniff the
water's edge. Ten well-armed palace wardens on the hunt.

One watches the others. The Commander. ING-KU. Mid 30s.
Tall. Euro-Asian features. He gestures to one of the men.

ING-KU

Med-Gan.

MED-GAN approaches. Mid 20s. Asian features. Arrogant.

MED-GAN

Yes, Commander.

ING-KU

Take half of the company and follow
the river east. A dog on either side.
I will pursue in the opposite
direction.

Med-Gan grins. Eager.

ING-KU (cont'd)

One of us will find her. If it is
you, do not hesitate to follow your
orders. Kill the girl on sight.

Med-Gan nods. Serious.

MED-GAN
Yes, Commander.

Ing-Ku steps closer.

ING-KU
The girl is more dangerous than you know. Use arrows if you can. Take her from a distance. If you must close on her, do so with stealth, and attack without warning.

MED-GAN
I understand, Commander.

Ing-Ku frowns.

ING-KU
I very much doubt that, but I will trust you to follow your orders.

Med-Gan hesitates.

MED-GAN
What about the woman?

Ing-Ku looks down the river. Then back.

ING-KU
Bring her to me. Alive.

Med-Gan salutes. Fist to heart. He turns sharply. Calls to the other men. Takes four. Heads east along the river. Ing-Ku watches for a moment. Calls to the remaining four men. Heads west.

INT. CANVAS TENT - NIGHT

Sloe-black eyes open to crow-black night. Eyes blink. A woman sits up. Breathing heavy. Sweating. JUNARI. Early 40s. Indian features.

Junari takes a deep breath. Pulls a cloak over her damp nightgown. Stands. Lifts the tent flap aside.

EXT. PILGRIM CAMP BESIDE THE OLD BORDER ROAD - NIGHT

Junari steps out of the tent into the pilgrim camp. Bare feet. Toes wriggle in the wild grass.

TITLES: The Old Border Road -- Between The Daeshen and Tanshen Dominions

A hundred tents spiral out from the center. Campfires are spread throughout. The camp sprawls across a untamed field on one side of the Old Border Road.

Two guards stand nearby. JUPTERUS. Male. Mid 20s. European features. KANTULA. Female. Mid 20s. Indian features.

KANTULA

Time for your nightly walk, Mother Shepherd?

JUNARI

I must do something. I cannot sleep after the dream, Jupterus.

JUPTERUS

Few of us can, Mother Shepherd.

Junari walks between the tents. Kantula and Jupterus follow.

JUNARI

Is all well in the camp?

JUPTERUS

The night guards around the perimeter have reported nothing, Mother Shepherd.

JUNARI

We can only march the Old Border Road, hemmed between the Daeshen and Tanshen Dominions, for so long before one of the Kam-Djen militias finds us. Or we are caught in one of the battles of their Long War.

JUPTERUS

They should embrace us, not hate us. The Goddess shows them the truth in her dreams.

JUNARI

Not all have the dreams. And Ni-Kam-Djen literally means "The True God" in Shen. The Tanshen and Daeshen people believe all other gods are false. How can they not hate a new goddess who places dreams in their believers' minds and the prophet who calls them to pilgrimage?

KANTULA

The Goddess will protect her pilgrims.

JUNARI

I am sure you are right, Kantula, but I will feel more comfortable when we reach the Zha Ocean and can be on our way to the Forbidden Realm.

KANTULA

I would feel more comfortable if we had scouts accessing the road ahead of us each day. Mother Shepherd.

JUNARI

As you have said, Kantula. Repeatedly. We will discuss it again in the morning.

Junari stops at the edge of the camp. The sister moons illuminate the Old Border Road stretching east and west.

JUNARI (cont'd)

Sometimes, I can hardly believe we have come so far from home.

Junari looks up at the sister moons.

INT. PASHIST TEMPLE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A mural painting of the sister moons covers one wall of the ornate council chamber. Three elderly high priests (tanjari) in purple robes sit in raised chairs. Of various ethnicities. GORONTHUS. Male. 70s. KANANTHUS. Male. 60s. PAGISTAA. Female. 70s.

Junari steps before them, head bowed.

TITLES: The Juparti Dominion -- 200 Days Ago

PAGISTAA

What have you done now, Junari? And how have you accomplished it?

Junari blinks. Startled.

JUNARI

I have done nothing, Tanjari Pagistaa.

GARONTHUS

Explain the dreams.

JUNARI

I cannot explain the dreams, Tanjari Garonthus.

KANTHARUS

Is this some manner of The Sight? Are you a seer in secret?

JUNARI

I am no seer, Tanjari Kantharus.

Junari looks between the three tanjari.

PAGISTAA

I can vouch that the girl does not possess The Sight. Regardless, she could not manage the skill to put the dream of a new goddess into thousands and thousands of minds across the Iron Realm each night.

GARONTHUS

How then? The Urris?

KANTHARUS

No one has seen an Urris in a hundred years or more.

PAGISTAA

The Urris have always proscribed travel to the Forbidden Realm. They would not use dreams to entice humans to travel there.

GARONTHUS

Then how? To what end?

Junari takes a deep breath. Steps closer to the tanjari.

JUNARI

The dreams frighten me. I cannot fathom why I am in them. They call me to actions I dread to take. You ask from where the dreams emanate and how. I believe they are the work of this new and nameless goddess. And I fear she wants me to be her prophet.

The tanjari are silent. For a time.

KANTHARUS

Do you wish to be a prophet?

JUNARI

I am a Pashist Priest. That is all I have ever desired.

Junari's hands tremble.

PAGISTAA

If this new goddess is truly coming forth into the world, granting the same nightly dream to thousands, beckoning them to the Forbidden Realm, naming you as their prophet, then I think you must follow this calling, for it is yours and yours alone to fulfill.

Tears fill Junari's eyes. She nods her head. Acceptance.

EXT. FIELD BESIDE THE OLD BORDER ROAD - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Junari looks down from the sister moons. She wipes her eyes. Turns back to the camp. A woman's scream shatters the stillness of the night.

Kantula and Jupiterus draw their swords. Another scream cuts through the air. Then shouts. Then cries.

KANTULA

A militia has found us!

Torches appear at the edge of the camp. Men with swords attack pilgrims as they stumble from their tents.

JUPTERUS

We must keep you safe, Mother Shepherd!

JUNARI

We must save the Goddess's flock!

Junari runs toward the violence, heedless of the danger.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan stands on one side of the table. Lee-Nin and Sao-Tauna on the other.

LEE-NIN

We were hungry. We only wanted some food. We'll go. We mean you no harm.

Sha-Kutan looks at the canvas bag. Then Lee-Nin.

SHA-KUTAN

You could not harm me.

They continue to stare at each other. After a moment, Sha-Kutan leans the axe handle against the table. He points to the sack of food.

SHA-KUTAN (cont'd)

Eat.

Lee-Nin hesitates. Then sits on the lone chair. Sao-Tauna on her lap. They begin to pull food from the sack and eat.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

Best to say little...

Yes. Let her tell her story.

Sha-Kutan goes to the cooking counter. Fills a clay cup with water from a pitcher. Places it on the table. Lee-Nin looks at him. Then passes the cup to Sao-Tauna. The girl takes a few gulps. Hands it back to Lee-Nin. She sips it.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

Saying nothing may be too little...

And we have too little time...

Sha-Kutan steps closer to the table. Towering above them.

SHA-KUTAN (CONT'D)

Why do the men hunt you?

Lee-Nin swallows. Looks up. Surprised. Fearful.

LEE-NIN

How do you know there are men chasing us? Have you seen them?

SHA-KUTAN

I know the same way I knew you approached my farm. Do they wish to harm you?

Lee-Nin finishes chewing a piece of dried meat. Wipes her mouth on the back of her dress sleeve.

LEE-NIN

Yes. My husband died. Killed in the Long War. A border skirmish with the Daeshen army. He defied his family to marry me. After my husband's death, his mother fell ill with grief. His father did not wait long after her passing to take a new and younger wife who bore him a boy. An heir. He had the courts declare my marriage to his son void and my daughter named a sacrilege. He is an influential man with powerful allies. The soldiers he sends to hunt us will kill me and my daughter if they catch us. I'm sorry we broke into your home. We have not eaten in days.

Lee-Nin takes another sip of water. Glances at Sao-Tauna. The girl frowns.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

A tragic story...
A story woven of lies...
 Why would she lie...?
What does she hide...?
 There was one truth in her tale...
Yes. The men will kill her and the girl if they are found...

Lee-Nin places an arm around Sao-Tauna.

LEE-NIN

We will go.

Lee-Nin puts a hand on the table. Slowly pushes up to stand.

SHA-KUTAN

They are too close. And you are too weak. They will find you.

Lee-Nin looks to Sao-Tauna. Back to Sha-Kutan. Frightened.

LEE-NIN

How close?

SHA-KUTAN

Close enough.

Sao-Tauna turns her eyes to stare at Sha-Kutan.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

Why does the girl stare at us so...?
 (MORE)

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

*She is a danger, but I do not know
how...
Maybe this is why they are hunted...
A dangerous child...?
A child in danger...?
What should we do...?
We can hold them and turn them over
to the soldiers...
Yes. The soldiers will leave then...
And we will be safe again...
And they will kill the girl...
And they will kill the woman...
After they have raped her...
We could...
Yes. We could...*

Sha-Kutan steps to the edge of the table. Startled, Lee-Nin grabs the meat knife again. Sha-Kutan looks at the knife. Then Lee-Nin.

SHA-KUTAN (CONT'D)

They will kill you if you run. I can hide you until they pass.

Lee-Nin continues to stare at Sha-Kutan. Uncertain. Sao-Tauna smiles.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

*The child's smile is unnerving...
Yes. No one ever smiles at us...
And the men are close...
Yes. And we must not kill them...*

Sha-Kutan crosses the small room to the back wall.

SHA-KUTAN

Come.

Lee-Nin and Sao-Tauna watch as Sha-Kutan pulls at the back wall. It moves. Pivoting at one end. Revealing a false wall and hiding space. A sword in a sheath gathers dust inside.

LEE-NIN

A hiding space for a sword?

SHA-KUTAN

It is from another time.

Sha-Kutan guides them into the hiding space and pushes the wall closed behind them.

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Lee-Nin holds Sao-Tauna's hand in the darkened space. Sao-Tauna looks up at her. Afraid. She squeezes the girl's hand.

Light seeps through a large crack in the wall. Lee-Nin places her eye near it.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan sits at the table in the one chair. Stares at the door. Waiting.

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Lee-Nin looks through the crack in the wall.

LEE-NIN
What is he doing?

Lee-Nin turns to Sao-Tauna. The girl looks up. Calm now.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
I'm so sorry.

Lee-Nin affectionately touches Sao-Tauna's hair.

EXT. TANSHEN PALACE PRIVATE BALCONY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The teeth of a comb catch in the tangle of rich, black hair. Lee-Nin tugs a comb through Sao-Tauna's hair.

SAO-TAUNA
Ouch.

They stand on a balcony above the palace gardens. Through the open door behind them -- a private library contains numerous shelves of books.

TITLES: The Tanshen Palace -- Ten Days Ago.

LEE-NIN
Honestly, Sao-Tauna, I don't know how your hair gets so tangled.

SAO-TAUNA
Ouch.

LEE-NIN
I comb it twice a day.

SAO-TAUNA
Ouch.

LEE-NIN

You hardly leave the living chambers and the gardens. I don't see how you get a mouse nest like this in your hair.

SAO-TAUNA

A mouse? In my hair?

LEE-NIN

It is a phrase of speaking. A way of describing something.

SAO-TAUNA

Oh. I like mice. Like Wan-Nun.

LEE-NIN

Must you name all the inhabitants of the palace?

SAO-TAUNA

Ja-Na was going to eat him.

LEE-NIN

Ja-Na? The black cat with the white feet?

SAO-TAUNA

Ja-Na likes mice.

(Pause.)

How can we both like mice, yet I don't want to eat one?

LEE-NIN

Words are subtle things.

Inside the library -- voices. The door opens. Lee-Nin pulls Sao-Tauna to the side. Out of sight.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

Quiet. Your mother and father will be furious if they find us here.

Sao-Tauna nods. Serious.

INT. TANSHEN PALACE PRIVATE LIBRARY - DAY (FLASHBACK CONT'D)

Two men in royal robes enter the small library. TAHN TAUJIN LIN-PI. Mid 40s. Tall. Handsome. Vaguely Asian features. And HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN. 60s. Stern. Vaguely European features.

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
 My deepest apologies, Tahn Lin-Pi,
 but I thought it best to speak where
 others could not...misunderstand

TAHN LIN-PI
 We will not be disturbed here.

Tahn Lin-Pi stands behind the table.

TAHN LIN-PI (cont'd)
 You have finished your investigation?

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
 Yes, my tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI
 And your conclusion?

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
 Our worst fears are realized, my
 tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI
 You are certain?

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
 Without doubt or suspicion of doubt,
 my tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI
 What must be done?

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
 There is only one course of action
 that ensures the safety of the
 dominion, my tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI
 There must be another way.

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
 You have seen the...phenomenon
 yourself, my tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI
 I have seen something, yes. We could
 wait. See if it occurs again.

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
 To wait would be to invite our own
 destruction, my tahn.

(MORE)

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN (cont'd)
Your uncle died from meddling with
such dark forces twenty years ago.

TAHN LIN-PI
You need not remind me of the
mistakes of my family.

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
My apologies, my tahn. I wish no
offense. My only desire is the
protection of the dominion and the
royal family.

TAHN LIN-PI
All except one member of the royal
family.

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
A regrettable necessity, my tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI
Killing my daughter is more than a
regrettable necessity, Bihn-Fan.

Tahn Lin-Pi scowls.

EXT. TANSHEN PALACE PRIVATE BALCONY - DAY (FLASHBACK CONT'D)

Lee-Nin clasps a hand over her mouth to stifle a gasp. Sao-Tauna looks up at her. Confused. Hurt. Lee-Nin places her thumb to her lips. Silence.

INT. TANSHEN PALACE PRIVATE LIBRARY - DAY (FLASHBACK CONT'D)

Tahn Lin-Pi looks down at the table. High Priest Bihn-Fan stares at the floor.

TAHN LIN-PI
You are certain Sao-Tauna must die?

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN
As certain as I am of standing in
this room with you, my tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI
If it must be, it must be. My
daughter will die to protect the
dominion.

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN

I know a man who can assist us, my tahn.

TAHN LIN-PI

No. If it is to be done, it will be by my hand. May Ni-Kam-Djen forgive me and protect us all.

HIGH PRIEST BIHN-FAN

Now and forever.

High Priest Bihn-Fan bows. Tahn Lin-Pi looks out the open balcony door to the gardens. Sadness twists his face.

EXT. TANSHEN PALACE PRIVATE BALCONY - DAY (FLASHBACK CONT'D)

Lee-Nin looks down to Sao-Tauna. Pulls her close. The girl stiffens but does not resist the embrace.

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Lee-Nin shudders. She squeezes Sao-Tauna's hand. Beyond the false wall -- dogs bark in the distance. Lee-Nin places her eye to the crack in the wall again.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan sits at the table -- waiting.

EXT. FIELD BESIDE THE OLD BORDER ROAD - NIGHT

Tents on fire. People running. Screaming. Militiamen hacking at pilgrims.

A tent flap opens. A man stumbles out. Confused. Brushing sleep from his eyes. Pulls on priestly robes. RAEDALUS. Late 30s. Indian features. He looks around. Shocked.

RAEDALUS

The Mother Shepherd!

He spins. Scans the pilgrim camp. Searching. A scream turns his head.

A flash of metal in the moonlight. MILITIAMAN ONE, in a worn leather jerkin, swings a curved blade.

A husband -- protecting his wife and small son -- collapses. Blood gushes from his stomach. The wife screams. Pulls the son close.

MILITIAMAN ONE

Blasphemers! We'll purge ya heretics
from the land!

Raedalus looks down. Sees a hand-sized rock. Grabs it. Throws.

Militiaman One raises his sword again.

The rock crashes into Militiaman One's head. He staggers. Drops the sword. The wife grabs the rock. Raises it high. Smashes it into Militiaman One's head. Again. Again. Militiaman One falls. Does not move.

Raedalus rushes forward. Picks up the sword. Holds it uncertainly. He turns to the wife.

RAEDALUS

If he can move, get him to the woods.
To safety. Hide!

He helps the woman pull the man to his feet. Looks around. At least 20 militiamen attack the pilgrim camp.

He runs through the tents. Shouting.

RAEDALUS (cont'd)

To the trees! Find shelter! To the
trees!

He stops. Looks over the camp. Frantic.

RAEDALUS (cont'd)

Mother Shepherd?

A militiaman cuts down a woman as she runs, striking her across the back. Raedalus leaps. Swings the sword. Strikes the militiaman in the neck. The man falls. Dies beside the dead woman. Raedalus stares at the dying man. Then at the sword. His hands tremble. He looks up. Tears in his eyes.

EXT. ROADSIDE MERCHANT CAMP IN AN ATHETON FOREST - NIGHT

Merchant wagons circle a small campfire. MERCHANT FATHER (50s), MERCHANT MOTHER (50s), MERCHANT SON ONE (30s), AND MERCHANT SON TWO (20s) share a meal. All European features.

An old man in traveling robes with a leather satchel sits across from them. ONDROMEAD. 80s. African features.

TITLES: The Atheton Dominion

The Merchant Mother hands Ondromead a bowl of kesodo (stew).

ONDROMEAD

Thank you for your kindness in sharing your meal.

MERCHANT MOTHER

Not a thing. People of the road gots to look out fer each other.

MERCHANT FATHER

Ya travel much, do you, old man?

ONDROMEAD

I...wander. A great deal.

MERCHANT SON ONE

Gots news from yer travels?

Ondromead thinks as he chews.

ONDROMEAD

The zhan of the Daeshen Dominion is dead. Killed in battle with Tanshen forces. His bother heads home to assume the throne and continue the Long War.

MERCHANT SON TWO

Didn't know the Daeshen zhan had a bother.

ONDROMEAD

Yes. Sent away when he was young to become a priest.

MERCHANT FATHER

A priest as zhan? Never heard such a thing.

MERCHANT MOTHER

We gots a woman Teyette on the throne here in Atheton. Guess they can have a priest on their Daeshen throne.

MERCHANT FATHER

If theys lucky this priest'll be half
the ruler Teyette Havarez is. May she
live many years.

MERCHANT MOTHER

May she live many years.

MERCHANT SON ONE

What's that? In the shadows!

The merchant sons stand. Draw their swords.

MERCHANT MOTHER

Put yer blades down 'fore you blunder
with 'em. Even my old eyes can see
it's just a boy. Come here, Boy

A boy steps from the shadows into the firelight. HASHEL. Ten
years old. Latino features. His clothes are as dirty as his
face. He looks at those around the campfire. Lingers on
Ondromead. Stares at the cook pot.

MERCHANT FATHER

The road at night ain't no place fer
a boy.

MERCHANT SON TWO

Whatch'a doin' out here boy?

Hashel shrugs.

MERCHANT SON ONE

Ya gots a name?

Hashel shrugs again.

ONDROMEAD

I don't believe the boy speaks.

Hashel looks at Ondromead. Nods.

MERCHANT FATHER

Mute boy in the woods. Ya lost?

Hashel shakes his head.

MERCHANT MOTHER

Ya want somethin' ta eat?

Hashel nods his head. Twice.

MERCHANT FATHER

Sit down boy.

Hashel sits near Ondromead. The Merchant Mother scoops him a bowl of stewed rabbit with vegetables over rice.

MERCHANT MOTHER

Here you go nameless boy. Road rabbit kesodo. Hope you like it spicy. I only cook spicy.

Hashel nods his thanks. Begins to eat.

MERCHANT FATHER

Good appetite. Even if he don't talk.

MERCHANT SON ONE

So, tell us, old man, what more news ya gots from the road.

Ondromead turns his eyes from Hashel. Thinks.

ONDROMEAD

Well, there is a new treaty between the Juparti and Punderra dominions to govern the fishing trade in the Tanfen Sea. And there was a big fire in Jaranta, the capital of Nevaeo. And...

Hashel eats. Listens to Ondromead. Sighs. Seems to relax for the first time in a very long time.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The sounds of dogs barking grows closer. Sha-Kutan sits at the table, making it seem small. His face glows in the lamplight. He looks out the window. Then to the door. Waits. Takes one of the books. Stares at it. Frowns.

EXT. TANSHEN FOREST - SUNRISE (FLASHBACK)

Sha-Kutan (mid 20s) sits beneath a wide branched tree. Cross legged. Wearing the amber robes of a Pashist monk. The same book sits beside him.

TITLES: The Juparti Dominion -- 19 Years Ago.

Across from him sits another monk. NUKAPAN. 50s. African features.

NUKAPAN

I am very impressed with your training this past year. You have completed the essential readings, and you have mastered the preliminary meditations for taming your mind and illuminating your inner essence.

SHA-KUTAN

Thank you, Master Nukapan.

NUKAPAN

However...I still sense anger in you. It radiates like an ember left in the ashes of a fire. And like an ember, it can burst to flame again with the proper fuel. Best to douse that ember completely. Do you remember your readings of Kana Joshi?

SHA-KUTAN

Yes, Master. Kana Joshi says, "Anger is the rotted seed that gives rise to a corrupt inner tree full of withered branches and thorns for leaves."

NUKAPAN

Just so. And for you to release that anger, you must acknowledge the causes of it. Do you know the true source of your anger?

SHA-KUTAN

I...It is hard to look at that place, Master.

NUKAPAN

Undoubtedly. Pain is the root of most anger. But such pain is in the past. Though we carry it with us, it is not here and now. We can recognize this and release the past's grip on us... even the past we refuse to see clearly. By doing so, we can abandon anger for peaceful minds.

SHA-KUTAN

I try, Master, but there is so very much anger within me and...I fear looking at what I have done because of it.

(MORE)

SHA-KUTAN (cont'd)

It is a mountain pressing down on me
that I cannot lift or crawl from
beneath.

NUKAPAN

I felt this mountain crushing me
once. I know the remedy.

Nukapan pulls two bags and two bowls from a leather satchel.

NUKAPAN (cont'd)

This is a different form of
meditation. A contemplation of your
life and actions.

Nukapan opens the small bags. One is filled with round red
stones. The other with white stones. Two dozen each. He
places them before Sha-Kutan with the two bowls.

NUKAPAN (cont'd)

You will review your life. Slowly.
All life is sacred and each action,
negative and positive, holds great
potential to affect the sacred lives
of others. For each vile and violent
action you have taken, you will
contemplate the person you harmed,
cultivating regret for your behavior.
Then you will place a red stone in
the first bowl. Likewise, for each
benevolent or selfless act, you will
contemplate your motivations and
place a white stone in the second
bowl. Do you understand?

Sha-Kutan selects one of the white stones. Sighs.

SHA-KUTAN

Yes. Master, Nukapan.

Sha-Kutan stares at the white stone.

SHA-KUTAN (cont'd)

This is the only white stone I will
require.

NUKAPAN

Ah. I feared as much.

SHA-KUTAN

And I will need many more red stones.

Nukapan blinks in surprise.

NUKAPAN

How many?

Sha-Kutan raises sad eyes with obvious effort.

SHA-KUTAN

Two more bags. At least.

Sha-Kutan returns his gaze to the single white stone.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

A dog whines. Sha-Kutan looks up from the book. Men's boots thump outside. The door bursts open. Two wardens rush in, swords drawn. Med-Gan pushes between them. Looks around the room. Levels his gaze at Sha-Kutan.

MED-GAN

Where are the woman and girl?

Sha-Kutan looks at the swords. Then the men.

SHA-KUTAN

Gone.

Med-Gan frowns. Looks around the empty room again.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Lee-Nin leans in. Eye near the crack in the false wall.

MED-GAN (O.S.)
Where are they?

Lee-Nin holds her breath.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A knife blade digs into the soft meat of the pine table. Med-Gan leans on the table, across from Sha-Kutan. Sha-Kutan stares back. Placid. Book in his massive hands.

SHA-KUTAN
I told you. Gone.

Med-Gan pulls the knife from the table. The other two wardens hold their swords pointed at Sha-Kutan. Two more men stand outside the door, blades drawn.

MED-GAN
Gone where?

SHA-KUTAN
Back along the path to the woods.

Sha-Kutan looks between the men.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
Whatever happens, we should not stand...
No. If they are intimidated, they will be foolish...
This one may be foolish no matter what we do...
If we appear meek, that may make him more comfortable...

Sha-Kutan looks at the book in his hands.

MED-GAN
How long ago did they leave?

SHA-KUTAN
Not long. A quarter candle. No more.

MED-GAN
Do you have a cellar?

SHA-KUTAN
In the barn.

Med-Gan turns to the wardens outside.

MED-GAN
Take a dog and search the barn.

The dogs whimper behind the wardens outside.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
The dogs are always smarter than the
men...
Unfortunately...

MED-GAN
What did they tell you?

SHA-KUTAN
They said they were hungry. I gave
them food. Then they left.

Med-Gan brandishes the knife to Sha-Kutan's face.

MED-GAN
Do not lie to me. Did the woman tell
you why we are chasing them?

Sha-Kutan looks at the knife blade.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
To control the mind is essential...
They do not need to die this night...
Life is sacred. To be preserved at
all costs...
The Book of Light says, "All things
are one thing living through each
other. To kill another is to murder
part of oneself..."

Med-Gan slams a metal studded glove into Sha-Kutan's head.

MED-GAN
I asked you a question, you dimwitted
dirt grubber!

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
Do not rise...
No. To rise would lead to...
Unpleasantness...

Sha-Kutan looks at Med-Gan.

SHA-KUTAN (CONT'D)

She told me her dead husband's father
wished to kill her and the child. To
maintain the family inheritance.

Med-Gan shakes his head.

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Lee-Nin leans closer to the crack in the false wall.

MED-GAN (O.S.)

She has no husband. And the girl is
not hers. Again. Where are they?

A dog whimpers beyond the wall. Lee-Nin swallows.

INT. DAESHEN PALACE ROYAL STUDY - NIGHT

Oil lamps illuminate leather-bound books lining tall
shelves. A massive desk faces the entrance. A couch sits by
the open balcony door. On the couch, reading a book -- DJU-
TESHA. Late 20s. Asian features.

TITLES: Daeshen Palace.

A man steps into the room. Green priestly robes. TIN-TSU. 30
years old. Asian features.

TIN-TSU

Whenever I think of you, I imagine
you with a book in your hands.

Dju-Tesha looks up. Startled.

DJU-TESHA

Tin-Tsu! You are home.

Puts the book down. Stands. Hesitant. Tin-Tsu goes to her.

TIN-TSU

Dju-Tesha.

They embrace. Cautiously.

TIN-TSU (cont'd)

It is good to see you, Sister.

DJU-TESHA

And you as well, Brother. When did you arrive?

Tin-Tsu steps away.

TIN-TSU

A few hours past. Mother greeted me. She was...Mother. Still.

DJU-TESHA

She has remained very consistent in the years of your absence. She is always...Mother.

Tin-Tsu smiles. Dju-Tesha returns the smile. Tin-Tsu steps back. Awkward silence. Then...

TIN-TSU

Thank for your letters through the years. They were often my sole comfort in the monastery.

Dju-Tesha looks down.

DJU-TESHA

I am sorry I stopped writing.

Tin-Tsu nods.

TIN-TSU

I understood. After father's death, everyone stopped writing.

Dju-Tesha looks up. Hint of anger in her eyes.

DJU-TESHA

You should have returned for his funeral. He always spoke of you with pride. The first priest in the family in six generations.

Tin-Tsu swallows.

TIN-TSU

I...I found I could not imagine this palace without him. All that I am is because father sent me away. I hated the monastery in my first years. The cold mountain air. The bland food. The regimen of prayers. But eventually it became my home.

(MORE)

TIN-TSU (cont'd)

And this place, all of you, something from a perfect past. I said the Prayers of Passing for Father each day for a year, but I could not bring myself to be here without him. And now...

DJU-TESHA

And now we have lost Fan-Mutig as well as Father. And the palace feels as an empty husk without their presence.

TIN-TSU

Two great zhans felled in battle. And their son and brother, a priest with no experience of state, must replace them on the throne. While the Long War rages with the Tanshen Dominion. While visions of a false goddess infect our people's dreams. While heretics roam the land, marching toward the Forbidden Realm in defiance of The Urris and The Pact.

DJU-TESHA

Father always said the Urris were the only cube on the koris board that could move without warning and never be captured.

TIN-TSU

I miss playing koris with Father.

Tin-Tsu looks at the large desk.

TIN-TSU (cont'd)

I see the desk Father sat at. That Fan-Mutig sat at. That every zhan for over a thousand years sat behind, and I fear sitting there more than the throne itself. It is the true seat of power in the dominion.

DJU-TESHA

I have read histories documenting the lives of all the rulers from before the First Great Dominion to after the collapse of the Third Great Dominion, and I am certain you will make an excellent zhan.

TIN-TSU
 Mother said I would make a competent
 zhan.

DJU-TESHA
 She is...Mother.

Tin-Tsu smiles. Takes Dju-Tesha's hands.

TIN-TSU
 Tell me, Sister, in all your
 readings, has a priest ever assumed
 the throne as zhan?

Dju-Tesha frowns.

DJU-TESHA
 No. No one.

Tin-Tsu nods. Sighs. Looks to the desk. Sighs again.

EXT. FIELD BESIDE THE OLD BORDER ROAD - NIGHT

Ten pilgrims huddled together. Four militiamen taunt them.
 Poking them with the tips of their swords. A flash of
 white -- Junari running toward the captive pilgrims.

Raedalus -- races toward the pilgrims and Junari.

MILITIAMAN TWO and MILITIAMAN THREE -- Gleeful in their
 violence.

MILITIAMAN TWO
 Squeal, heathen!

MILITIAMAN THREE
 Cry for yer false god to protect ya!

JUNARI
 Stop!

Junari places herself between the pilgrims and militiamen.

Nearly there -- Raedalus trips over a dead body. Tumbles to
 the ground.

JUNARI (cont'd)
 We mean no harm. We are pilgrims. We
 walk in peace.

MILITIAMAN THREE

That's her! That's the filthy bitch herself!

MILITIAMAN TWO

Kill her and the vermin'll stop comin' to our lands!

Raedalus stumbles to his feet. Lifts the sword. Ready to charge.

The four militiamen advance on Junari.

She raises her hands as she looks to the sky -- her voice loud and clear in the cacophony.

JUNARI

Protect us, Goddess Moaratana!

Blue-white brilliance fills the night. Lightning flows from the clouded night sky -- a rivulet of liquid light strikes the swords of the four militiamen in mid-swing, sending them hurtling backward. Instantly dead.

JUNARI (cont'd)

Protect us, Goddess Moaratana!

Brilliant, jagged strings of lightning descended in an instant, striking the swords of all the militiamen attacking the pilgrims throughout the campsite. The militiamen scream. Smoke as they crumple to the ground. Dead.

Junari lowers her arms. Eyes sad. WOMAN ONE looks at her.

WOMAN ONE

A miracle. A miracle of the Goddess!

MAN ONE stares at Junari.

MAN ONE

You called down lightning!

JUNARI

No, I called on the Goddess. As we all must call on her now.

(To the crowd.)

Help our people. Tend to the wounded. We must bury our dead. We leave at sunrise. Hurry now!

The pilgrims lurch into action. Following Junari's orders.

She turns to Raedalus. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

JUNARI (cont'd)
 Raedalus, my old friend. It is
 fortunate our goddess knows you from
 our enemies.

Raedalus looks to the sword in his hand.

RAEDALUS

I...

JUNARI

Keep it. Learn to use it. We will
 have need of it again, I fear.

RAEDALUS

I...I am not meant to be a killer, I
 think.

Kantula and Jupiterus rush up.

KANTULA

Mother Shepherd. You must not run off
 like that!

JUPTERUS

We are meant to protect you!

JUNARI

As you have seen, the Goddess
 Moaratana will protect me. Protect
 all of us.

RAEDALUS

The Goddess has a name now?
 Moaratana?

JUNARI

The name came to my lips as I spoke.
 Placed there by the Goddess herself.

RAEDALUS

The Dragon Star.

JUNARI

Yes. A fateful name. Now come. All of
 you. We have much to do, and dawn
 will arrive all too soon.

Junari leads the way into the camp. Raedalus hesitates.
 Looks at the sword again. He frowns. Lowers it but does not
 put it down. Follows the Mother Shepherd.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan looks at the dogs cowering outside. Warden One steps back into the house.

WARDEN ONE

Nothing in the barn, sir. Barely has a cellar. More like a hole in the ground.

MED-GAN

Peasants. Drag those lazy mutts in here. Maybe they can get a better scent.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

If the dogs search the house, they will smell the woman and girl...
We must not allow that to happen...

Sha-Kutan looks at the wardens. Then the axe. Frowns.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

We must distract them...
Make them punish us...
Forget about the dogs and the house.

Sha-Kutan fumbles with the book in his hands. It skids across the table.

MED-GAN

What's this? *The Book of Light?*
(Picks up the book.)
This book is a Pashist sacrilege. The Kam-Djen priests are clear. There is only one god. Only Ni-Kam-Djen. To worship a false Pashist god is an abomination.

SHA-KUTAN

It's merely a book.

MED-GAN

Do you know what the punishment for heresy is, Pashist?

Med-Gan grabs Sha-Kutan by the hair, meaning to pull his head back. Sha-Kutan's head does not move.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

We must not defend ourselves...
We must protect the woman and child...

(MORE)

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
Weakness. We must display weakness...
Weakness encourages the wicked...

Sha-Kutan allows his head to be pulled back.

MED-GAN
I asked you a question, you mindless drooler.

SHA-KUTAN
No. I do not know the punishment.

MED-GAN
Fifty lashes. But I could kill you, and Ni-Kam-Djen would rejoice.

Med-Gan places the knife to Sha-Kutan's throat.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
Breathe in the light of love; breathe out the darkness of anger...
Yes. Love before anger...

WARDEN ONE coughs.

WARDEN ONE
The fugitives, Sir?

Med-Gan looks to Warden One. Then Sha-Kutan.

MED-GAN
Find some rope and take this halfwit heretic outside and tie him to a post. And drag those mongrels in here to catch the scent.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
If the dogs enter, they will find the woman and child...
And then we must kill the soldiers...

Med-Gan tugs at Sha-Kutan's shirt. He does not budge.

MED-GAN
Get up or I'll run you through where you sit.

Med-Gan yanks at Sha-Kutan again to no effect.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
They are men, sacred living beings deserving of life...
They will kill the woman and girl...

MED-GAN

Do you hear me, stone brain!?

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

There are too many to kill with our hands...

If we kill them in that way, She will sense it and She will come...

She will hunt us once more...

Med-Gan draws his sword.

MED-GAN

Move!

SHA-KUTAN

Please go.

MED-GAN

If you will not stand, you can sit here forever!

Med-Gan raises his sword. Begins to swing. The lamp flame flickers. A darkness blacker than oblivion spreads across the wardens. The flame flutters out. A shadow consumes the room. Med-Gan's sword glints in the moonlight -- stopped by an unseen force. Sha-Kutan stands. The wardens scream as they die.

EXT. ROADSIDE IN WESTERN JUPARTI MARSHLANDS - NIGHT

A small campfire spits sparks into the night air. A woman sleeps nearby. OGTANKAA. Late 30s. Indian-Arab features.

She sits up. Suddenly awake. Sword in hand. She blinks. Looks around. Stands slowly.

TITLES: Western Juparti.

She takes a silver medallion from beneath her shirt. Holds it out. Turns around. Stops. Faces the sister moons. West.

OGTANKAA (V.O.)

Where has it been hiding...?

What will it look like now...?

And what will it call itself...?

Why has it been silent so long...?

We will know that when we find it...

Ogtankaa sheaths her sword. Begins to break camp.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Lee-Nin clings to Sao-Tauna in the darkness. No light. Only sounds -- Swords clang. Men shout. Dogs bark. Then silence.

The lamplight returns. Footsteps approach the false wall. It swings back. Sha-Kutan stares at her. Blood on his face. And shirt. And hands.

SHA-KUTAN

You are safe. But I need your help.

Lee-Nin steps into the room with Sao-Tauna.

LEE-NIN

You killed all of them?

Five dead bodies litter the room. Two with swords through their chests. Med-Gan with a knife in his eye. One with the axe in his back. And one dead from no apparent injury.

Lee-Nin looks to Sao-Tauna. The girl appears surprised but not horrified.

SHA-KUTAN

I could find no path that left them alive and did not end with you dead.

Sha-Kutan picks up Med-Gan. Easily tosses the body over his shoulder. He grabs another warden. Hefts the body up.

SHA-KUTAN (cont'd)

How many more hunt you?

LEE-NIN

I don't know. Another hand at least. If they had been near enough to count, we would be dead.

Sha-Kutan grunts.

SHA-KUTAN

I will put the bodies in the cellar in the barn. Pack all the food you can find.

Sha-Kutan carries the bodies out the door. Lee-Nin guides Sao-Tauna to the bed. Sits her on the thin mattress.

LEE-NIN

Stay here.

Sao-Tauna nods. Lee-Nin hurries to the cooking counter. Grabs the canvas sack. Fills it with the rest of the food from the pantry.

Sha-Kutan returns. He hands her a clay jug.

SHA-KUTAN

Take this. It's tamak seed oil. Pour it over the blood and light it on fire. Douse the flames with a blanket from the bed.

LEE-NIN

Why?

Sha-Kutan lifts two more bodies into his arms.

SHA-KUTAN

It will disguise what happened. And confuse the dogs that are with the men who follow you.

Sha-Kutan carries the bodies out the door.

Lee-Nin pours the oil on the puddles of blood. Takes a stick of kindling from the fireplace. Lights it in the lamp. Touches the flame to the oil-soaked blood. Fire jumps up.

She stumbles back. Into Sao-Tauna. The girl hands her a blanket.

LEE-NIN

Thank you.

Lee-Nin uses the blanket to smother the pools of flame.

Sha-Kutan returns. Lee-Nin folds the singed blanket into neat squares. Sha-Kutan hefts the final body. Stares at Lee-Nin holding the blanket. Cocks his head. Shrugs. Carries the body outside.

Lee-Nin grabs the canvas sack of food. Looks around. Spies the meat knife. Takes it. Slides the blade into a pocket fold of her dress. She takes Sao-Tauna's hand as Sha-Kutan returns. He carries a burlap harvest sack filled with what looks like it might be potatoes.

He says nothing. Goes to the trunk by the bed. Opens it. Stuffs clothes in the sack. Goes to the false wall in the back. Removes the dust caked sword.

Wipes it down with a rag from his pocket. Puts the sword in the sack. The sack strap over his shoulder. Pushes the false wall back into place.

Lee-Nin stands at the door holding Sao-Tauna's hand.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
Thank you. For helping us.

Sha-Kutan nods.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
You saved our lives, but if we do not leave now, your actions will have been wasted.

Sha-Kutan nods again.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
When the others come, what will you do?

SHA-KUTAN
I will not be here when they arrive.

Sha-Kutan goes to the table.

LEE-NIN
We seek a road toward the nearest town.

Sha-Kutan takes the books.

SHA-KUTAN
The road lies behind us. Half an hour walk. A town is two days to the east.

LEE-NIN
Thank you. Again.

Lee-Nin turns to go. Stops. Frowns. Turns back.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
Which way will you go?

Sha-Kutan stares at her. Blinks. Cocks his head.

SHA-KUTAN
Toward the road and the town.

Sha-Kutan steps forward. His massive hands clutch the books.

SHA-KUTAN (cont'd)

I flee with you.

Lee-Nin's mouth opens in surprise. Sao-Tauna smiles.

EXT. FIELD BESIDE THE OLD BORDER ROAD - NIGHT

Junari walks along the edge of the Old Border Road. A line of pilgrims grieving. Mounds of black soil. Short branches of leaves mark the graves. Behind -- dead militiamen scattered across the field.

Women wail their grief. Children sob. Men wipe their eyes. The wounded moan in wagons.

An older woman joins Junari. TAKSATI. 70s. African features.

JUNARI

You need not say it.

TAKSATI

I have been your servant for twenty years. I always speak what you need to hear.

JUNARI

Please, Taksati.

TAKSATI

You have not failed them.

JUNARI

But I have, and we both know I have.

TAKSATI

You did lead them here along this road. But you did not call them to this journey. The Goddess beckoned them. You could have ignored the dreams to become the Mother Shepherd, and another would have answered. And these people would still be dead. But now they have you to bear the burden of their deaths. To make meaning of their sacrifices. And there is no one better suited to that task.

Junari stops. Looks at Taksati. Tears in both their eyes.

JUNARI

As ever, you give me the wisest council...Whether I wish it or not.

Taksati places a wrinkled hand on Junari's cheek.

TAKSATI

Let the Goddess speak through you.

Junari nods. Turns to the mourning pilgrims.

EXT. SMALL FARM - NIGHT

Ing-Ku stands between the house and barn. The doors of both are open. WARDEN TWO steps from the barn. The other wardens lead dogs from the house.

WARDEN TWO

They're all dead, Commander.

ING-KU

I warned him.

WARDEN TWO

What do you think happened here?

ING-KU

Med-Gan forgot that his promotion to warden rested more upon his father's connections at court than his own abilities, which were limited at best.

WARDEN TWO

But who killed them? A lone farmer? Did the woman help? How...?

ING-KU

The girl.

Warden Two looks back to the barn. Confused.

ING-KU (cont'd)

What can the dogs tell us?

WARDEN TWO

There is a path behind the house. They have the farmer's scent, but they aren't keen to follow.

ING-KU

That's good enough. We track this farmer. If they aren't with him, he'll know where they went.

Ing-Ku stares at the farm moment. Strides away.

EXT. FIELD BESIDE THE OLD BORDER ROAD - NIGHT

Junari stands before the pilgrims weeping around the graves. She raises her hands.

JUNARI

This night of tears stabs at my heart. We have lost many brothers and sisters and little ones in this bloody field. They will never see the dark waves of the Zha Ocean or the far shores of the Forbidden Realm. They will not bend their backs to help rebuild the fallen temple of our dreams. But they will watch over us. They will give us strength when we feel weak. They will grace us with courage when we are filled with fear. They will remind us of our promises and our oaths when we forget our purpose. And they will welcome us when we, too, pass through the slender veil between this world and the next. Until that day, we will love them and remember them and honor the sacrifice they offered of themselves for us this night - this night of tears.

Junari pauses. The pilgrims murmur their assent. Two weeping women reach out. She holds their hands.

JUNARI (cont'd)

Moaratana...

The pilgrims repeat the name of the new goddess.

JUNARI (cont'd)

The Goddess Moaratana defended us in our terror, and I assure you that she will shelter our loved ones in death. She is benevolent and loving, but she also is fierce and powerful, and those who seek to harm us will feel her wrath. We leave our dead here as we march forward, but we will carry them with every step.

Junari releases the women's hands. Clasps hers together at her chest. She bows her head.

JUNARI (cont'd)

Moaratana, bless us in our time of sorrow. We have given our loved ones to the earth. Hold them in your bosom as we carry them in our memories. Comfort and protect them until we are reunited. Bless us with the solace of your grace and merciful compassion. Anaha, Ahana.

Junari raises her head. Gasps of wonder spread among the pilgrims. Hands make spirals over hearts. Others point the to the sky. Junari turns. Trepidatious.

A brilliant crimson star blazes between parted clouds. Junari stares. Astonished. Vindicated.

JUNARI (cont'd)

Moaratana. The Dragon Star!

Cheers and chants of the Goddess's name rise up from the pilgrims. Taksati and Raedalus step to Junari's side.

RAEDALUS

The goddess gives us a beacon to guide us to the Forbidden Realm.

TAKSATI

A warning to all other faiths that she is more real than their gods.

JUNARI

You are both right. But the road will be more dangerous now, even with the power of Moaratana to protect us. And once we reach the Forbidden Realm, we will have the Urris to contend with.

They stare in wonder at the Dragon Star star hanging above the Old Border Road.

EXT. TANSHEN COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Dried leaves skitter across a dirt-packed road. Sha-Kutan carries Lee-Nin and Sao-Tauna from the woods. Sao-Tauna, contentedly. Lee-Nin, uncomfortably.

LEE-NIN

Surely the dogs either have our scent or not by now.

Sha-Kutan puts them down. They walk along the road.

Sao-Tauna walks beside Lee-Nin. She frowns as she looks down.

INT. TANSHEN PALACE PRIVATE LIBRARY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Sao-Tauna's father, Tahn Lin-Pi, approaches with a knife. High Priest Bihn-Fan tries to hold her. She struggles. Glares at the high priest. Thrusts out a finger of one hand. Bihn-Fan cries out. Her father gasps.

EXT. TANSHEN COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Sao-Tauna bites her lip. Blinks her eyes. Frowns. Looks up. Clouds part to reveal The Dragon Star. Sao-Tauna raises a finger to point. Lee-Nin follows her hand. Stops still. Looks upward. Sha-Kutan halts as well.

LEE-NIN

I have seen that star.

SHA-KUTAN

No one has seen that star before. It should not be there.

LEE-NIN

The dreams. It's the star from the dreams.

Sha-Kutan stares at her. Curious.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

Do you have the dreams? The dreams of the new goddess and the new star?

Sha-Kutan shakes his head.

SHA-KUTAN

I do not often sleep.

Sao-Tauna gazes up at Sha-Kutan. Then the star.

EXT. SHORE OF THE ZHA OCEAN - NIGHT

Waves lap against the shore. The clouded sister moons reflect across the water. Two forms sleep in the sand. Far from the waves. Ondromead and Hashel.

TITLES: The Daeshen Coast of the Zha Ocean

Ondromead wakes suddenly. Looks at the boy. Confused. The boy stirs. Blinks awake. Sits up. Looks around. Surprised. Turns to Ondromead.

ONDROMEAD

No. You do not dream. We are by the ocean. The Zha Ocean, from the position of the sister moons. Thousands of strides from the merchant camp were we met in Atheton.

Hashel scoots away.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

You need not fear. I am no seer. I do not work The Sight to make us travel. This is the way of my life. I wake in a new place each morning. I witness what I have been drawn there to see. I record the events in my book. I fall asleep. And I wake somewhere new again. But never, in all the thousands of years of my witnessing, have I ever had someone travel with me while I slept.

Hashel stares up at Ondromead.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

You really do not speak?

Hashel shakes his head.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

Fortunately, I am used to to talking to myself. What shall I call you if I cannot ask your name?

Hashel shrugs. Ondromead looks to the sister moons.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

Hashel. I shall call you Hashel.

Hashel nods his head in surprise.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

That is your name?

Hashel nods again.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

Interesting. It was the first thing to come to my mind.

(MORE)

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

I call myself Ondromead. Such a strange night. New things after thousands of years of sameness. I do not think I will be able to sleep again tonight. I might wake somewhere else and you might not be there. It will be nice to have a traveling companion after so long alone. Would you like that? To travel with me? For today at least. Unless you follow me again tomorrow night when I wake somewhere else.

Hashel thinks. Then nods his head emphatically.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

Good. That is good. The sun will be up soon. Until then I can tell you a story. A story about the moons, perhaps? People call them the sister moons because the Yiityoth tribe of the Kytain Dominion called them sisters, hiding from brother sun, who...That is odd. There is a new star. There! I have heard people speak of a dream of such a star. Do you have these dreams?

Hashel nods. Looks to where the parting clouds reveal the Dragon Star.

ONDROMEAD (cont'd)

Such a strange and wondrous night.

They both stare at the Dragon Star over the Zha Ocean.

INT. DAESHEN PALACE ROYAL SLEEPING CHAMBER - NIGHT

A hem of royal-blue silk glides across a polished marble floor in moonlight. A hand lights an oil lamp. Tin-Tsu steps into the light. He wears an ornate silk sleeping robe. The sleeping chamber is lavishly furnished.

He bows his head. Eyes open.

TIN-TSU

Great Father, protect me all my day
and through my night...

He lifts his head. Sees something. Goes to the balcony door. Opens it.

EXT. DAESHEN PALACE SLEEPING CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT

Tin-Tsu steps onto the balcony above the palace gardens. He looks up to the Dragon Star.

TIN-TSU

The heretic dream made real!

He shakes his head. Sighs. Looks down to the garden. Spots a particularly large tree. Sighs again.

EXT. DAESHEN PALACE GARDENS - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Tin-Tsu (age 15) stands by a large tree in the gardens. Beside his FATHER. 50s. Both wear princely robes.

FATHER

Do you know why I send you away?

TIN-TSU

I have shamed you and the faith.

FATHER

I send you away not to punish you but to give you the chance to create a new path for your life, one far from the palace and your family and... friends. I am sending you to the mountain temple of Ten-Fan-Het. There you will make of yourself something else. Something pure. A servant of Ni-Kam-Djen.

TIN-TSU

How long will I be banished?

FATHER

This is not a banishment. It is an opportunity for redemption. And it will last as long as it lasts.

TIN-TSU

I am sorry, Father.

FATHER

So am I, Son. You will be missed. By me. By your brother and sister. And your mother.

TIN-TSU

I am not certain mother will miss me.

FATHER

Your mother loves you best of all her children. You need only watch the way she refuses to favor you to know the truth of that love. She will miss you more than any of us. And I will have faith in you even when you fail to have faith in yourself.

Tin-Tsu bows his head. Sadness and shame.

EXT. DAESHEN PALACE SLEEPING CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Tin-Tsu looks up from the gardens to the Dragon Star.

TIN-TSU

Great Father, protect me all my day and through my night. Guide me in my thoughts, inspire me in my words, help me to fulfill the promise of my actions. Cast away my enemies. Unburden me of my travails. Grant me strength to follow your path even when the way is clouded and unclear. I bind myself to you now and for always, Ni-Kam-Djen, Great Father, Guardian of the Innocent, Slayer of the Wicked, Ruler of All.

Tin-Tsu stares at the Dragon Star star in defiance.

EXT. TANSHEN COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Sao-Tauna walks between Lee-Nin and Sha-Kutan. They do not speak for a time.

LEE-NIN

Why did you come with us?

Sha-Kutan looks to the ground. Then to Sao-Tauna.

SHA-KUTAN

You are not the only ones being hunted.

LEE-NIN

Who is hunting you?

SHA-KUTAN

A lone woman hunts me.

LEE-NIN

Why?

SHA-KUTAN

I have done things.

LEE-NIN

Is she dangerous?

SHA-KUTAN

For me...very.

Sao-Tauna shares a long, silent look with Lee-Nin.

LEE-NIN

I don't even know your name.

SHA-KUTAN

I am Sha-Kutan.

LEE-NIN

I am Lee-Nin, and this is Sao-Tauna.

SHA-KUTAN

You do not have a dead husband. Why do the soldiers hunt you?

Lee-Nin glances at Sao-Tauna. The girl nods.

LEE-NIN

They wish to kill Sao-Tauna.

SHA-KUTAN

Why?

LEE-NIN

I do not know. Her father is a high tahn in the Tanshen palace. The zhan's brother. Her father ordered her death. I tried to warn her mother, but I am merely her tutor. I ended up in the palace cells.

SHA-KUTAN

That is truth. How did you escape?

LEE-NIN

Sao-Tauna released me from the cell. I don't know how. She hasn't spoken since then. That was ten days ago. The palace wardens have been hunting us ever since.

SHA-KUTAN
 You escaped the palace and avoided
 the tahn's elite wardens for ten
 days? How?

Lee-Nin raises her chin. Looks Sha-Kutan in the eyes.

LEE-NIN
 I am resourceful.

Sha-Kutan nods.

SHA-KUTAN
 That is also truth.

They stop at a crossroads.

LEE-NIN
 Which way should we go?

SHA-KUTAN
 Straight north. Past the town. There
 is a forest where we can hide.

SAO-TAUNA
 No.

Lee-Nin and Sha-Kutan stop. Sao-Tauna looks at them.

SAO-TAUNA (cont'd)
 That way.

Sao-Tauna points toward the Dragon Star in the west.

SAO-TAUNA (cont'd)
 Like in the dreams.

Lee-Nin and Sha-Kutan hold each other's eyes. Nod. Turn west. Continue walking. Sao-Tauna walks between them -- staring at the Dragon Star. Smiling.

EXT. DAESHEN PALACE SLEEPING CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT

Tin-Tsu stands on the balcony. Still praying. A rustling of cloth within the sleeping chamber catches his attention. He turns. Sees the glint of lamplight on steel. Four men dressed like palace guards. Four blades bared in malice.

TIN-TSU
(Whispers.)
Night-daggers.
(Sighs.)
So soon.

Tin-Tsu takes a deep breath. A grim smile crosses his lips.
He calls out his prayer as he steps forward.

TIN-TSU (cont'd)
Great Father, protect me all my day
and through my night...

Tin-Tsu strides toward the sleeping chamber and the men come
to kill him.

END OF EPISODE