

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 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...

(MORE)

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

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 at 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 smiles at the girl. Sao-Tauna blinks. 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.

EXT. FOREST BEHIND THE SIMPLE FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan stands hidden behind the branches of a low tree watching Lee-Nin and Sao-Tauna enter the farmhouse.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

*What is she doing?
Robbing us if she is smart...
We should wait...
Wait until they leave...
But the men are close...
Close and coming closer still...*

Sha-Kutan steps back and disappears into the leaves.

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. Dried meat.

Sao-Tauna cocks her head at Lee-Lin.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)

I know it's stealing, but we ran out of coins to repay the farmer. Maybe he has coins hidden.

Lee-Nin looks around the small house, then back to Sao-Tauna.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
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. Looks at the stack of books. Lee-Nin follows her eyes.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
What sort of farmer keeps so many books? Maybe he was not always a farmer.

Lee-Nin touches the stack of books. Squints

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
In Mumtiba not Shen. Pashist books? Heresy.

Lee-Nin looks around the room again. Blinks.

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
We should leave. Now.

The thud of boot-steps 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. 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 the knife.

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...
May be too little...
And we have too little time...

Sha-Kutan steps toward the table.

SHA-KUTAN (CONT'D)

How did you end up here?

LEE-NIN

We were traveling along the river and saw your farm.

SHA-KUTAN

Why were you following the river?

LEE-NIN

We got lost. Our horse ran off. We are sorry to trouble you. You are very kind to feed us.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)

Too many lies...
And we have even less time...

Sha-Kutan sighs. Steps to the edge of the table. Towering over 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...

(MORE)

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

Lee-Nin and Sao-Tauna stare as Sha-Kutan looks between them
 and then away. Lee-Nin is wary. Sao-Tauna calm.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
 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 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. You will be
safe in there.

LEE-NIN

They have dogs.

SHA-KUTAN

The dogs will not enter the house.

LEE-NIN

Why not?

SHA-KUTAN

Because of me. Now hurry.

Lee-Nin looks at Sao-Tauna. The girl nods. They step into the hiding space and Sha-Kutan pushes the wall closed.

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Lee-Nin takes 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 crack in the wall. Lee-Nin places her eye near it.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan sits at the table. 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 frowns.

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan sits at the table, making it seem small.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.)
The men are close...
Yes. Very close...

He looks at the stack of books. Touches the spine of one.

SHA-KUTAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
And we must...
Must convince them to leave...
Leave alive...

The sounds of dogs barking grows closer. Sha-Kutan's face glows in the lamplight. He looks out the window. Then to the door. Takes one of the books. Stares at it. Frowns.

A dog whines. Sha-Kutan looks up from the book. Men's boots thump outside. Sha-Kutan breathes deep. Exhales slowly.

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 they?

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

SHA-KUTAN
Who?

Med-Gan steps into the room. Glowers at Sha-Kutan.

MED-GAN
The woman and girl. Do not lie. I
know they are here.

SHA-KUTAN
There is no one here. See for
yourself.

Sha-Kutan gestures around the single room.

MED-GAN
The dogs say they came here. To this
house. Where are they?

Sha-Kutan looks between Med-Gan and the soldiers.

SHA-KUTAN
Gone.

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

MED-GAN
So they were here?

SHA-KUTAN
Yes.

MED-GAN
And where are they now?

SHA-KUTAN
I told you. Gone.

Med-Gan fingers the hilt of the dagger at his belt.

MED-GAN
Gone where?

SHA-KUTAN
I did not see.

Med-Gan leans on the table.

MED-GAN
I am losing my patience with you,
fool. Gone where?

SHA-KUTAN
Along the path to the river. Maybe.

MED-GAN
How long ago did they leave?

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

Sha-Kutan looks to the open door where two more men stand outside, blades drawn.

INT. HIDING SPACE IN SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

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

MED-GAN (O.S.)
I don't believe you. Where are they?

Lee-Nin holds her breath.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. PILGRIM CAMP BESIDE THE OLD BORDER ROAD - NIGHT

A hundred tents sprawl across an untamed field of grass beside a wide, well-packed dirt road. Watch fires dot the campsite.

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

The tents spiral out from one in the center.

INT. CANVAS TENT - NIGHT

A woman lies on an ornate rug. Sweating. Dreaming. JUNARI. Early 40s. Indian features.

EXT. TEMPLE RUINS - NIGHT (DREAM)

DREAM IMAGES BLEND TOGETHER:

Stars blazing 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 -- face indistinct -- stands atop a temple dais.

GODDESS

I am the new goddess come to release
you.

The worshipers cheer.

INT. CANVAS TENT - NIGHT

Sloe-black eyes open to crow-black night. The eyes blink. Junari sits up. Takes a deep breath. Looks to the stars through a gap in the tent flap. Breaths deep again. Sighs. Pulls a cloak over her damp nightgown.

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.

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. 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. KANTHARUS. 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 go 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

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

MED-GAN

Do you have a cellar, fool?

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...

Sha-Kutan looks between the men.

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

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...

And we must...

Must not kill them...

Sha-Kutan looks at the book in his hands. Sighs.

EXT. TANSHEN FOREST - SUNRISE (FLASHBACK)

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

TITLES: The Juparti Dominion -- 19 Years Ago.

Across from him sits another monk. NUKAPAN. 50s. African features. A sword lies in the grass beside each man.

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. 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

Sha-Kutan looks up from the book as Med-Gan's hand slams into the table.

MED-GAN

What did they tell you?

SHA-KUTAN

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

Med-Gan yanks the knife blade from the table and brandishes it 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 blade before his eyes.

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 looks down and 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 the 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 paws?

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. 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.

MED-GAN (O.S.)

I will not ask again. Where are they?

Lee-Nin places her eye to the crack in the wall again.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. CITY OF TAGU-LAN: DAESHEN PALACE - NIGHT

The palace squats in the center of the city of Tagu-Lan, massive stone walls rising above the surrounding buildings.

TITLES: Daeshen Palace.

The lights of the palace illuminate numerous gardens, trees climbing above the ramparts.

INT. DAESHEN PALACE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Shadows fight the hazy yellow light of lamps lining the stone walls of the inner palace corridors. A man in green priestly robes walks along the polished tile floor.

TIN-TSU. 30 years old. Asian features.

He nods to guards stationed at an intersection. Continues walking. Comes to an open door. Stops. Hesitates.

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.

Tin-Tsu steps into the room. Stares at Dju-Tesha.

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.

Tin-Tsu looks away.

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 our brother 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 the 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. Not once.

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

INT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Sha-Kutan looks at the dogs cowering outside. WARDEN ONE
 steps 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 picks up the book.

MED-GAN

What's this? Mumtiba? I have heard of this book. This book is a Pashist sacrilege. The Kam-Djen priests are clear. There is only one god. Only Ni-Kam-Djen. To worship the false Pashist gods 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...
 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 in shadow.

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.

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

Junari! 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.

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

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.

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.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

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 with 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 led 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.

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 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 she will shelter our loved ones in death. She is benevolent and loving, but she is also 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)

A new star. As in the dreams of the Goddess. Moaratana. The Dragon Star!

Cheers and chants of the Goddess's name errupt 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 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. A flash of light.

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.

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. Eyes firm. Resolute. Breathes deep.

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 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 don't know. Her father is a high
tahn in the Tanshen palace. Tahn
Taujin Lin-Pi. The zhan's brother.
Her father ordered her death.

(MORE)

LEE-NIN (cont'd)
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 a 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