

TABLETS OF THE BEDOUIN

Of the Seer Who Would Not See

Written by
Ahmad Alayar

ahmad.alayar@gmail.com

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Wisps of light blow violently through an endless black void. Deep within, RUDAINA's translucent arms carry a baby. He is fully material. SUHAIL. A muted voice breaks through over a thousand others. The ELDER's.

ELDER (V.O.)
Leave then!

The voices behind hers are screaming.

ELDER (V.O.)
Or you would curse us all!

The baby cries as ghostly arms cradle him, rocking off-rhythm with the wisps. Nearby, THAABAN's trace flickers. Fuzzy. His hands flail against a hurricane of white strands. They whip him in time with the baby's cries. He grunts with each lashing. Each wisp flickers with a life. Together, the Voice:

A tongue burned by tea. Fingers between fur. Steam against a face. A laugh inside someone else's chest. A oner of perspectives bleeding into each other, too densely to separate. Random people going about their days across Al-Lawha. Rudaina's arms lower the baby into the darkness. Then stutter across the void to Thaaban. They stroke his head.

RUDAINA (O.S.)
Hear my voice, my heartbeat. This
will pass.

Far ahead in the black, a single strand of light pulses brighter. It pulls the others around it. The chaotic current goes still. A woman hums from inside it. Almost the Melody of Warmth. Not quite. A muffled man's voice emerges behind the hum. ALDEBARAN's.

ALDEBARAN (V.O.)
You're so close to it.

The baby turns his head towards the melody. He stops crying. The wisps around Thaaban's ghost disperse back into the void. Suhail crawls, past traces of Rudaina holding a fuzzy Thaaban, towards another wisp. Into another collage of lives. Wisp after wisp after wisp. Person after person after person.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID - LATER

Suhail is a toddler crawling through the darkness. Wisps of light whip him, over and over. He keeps crawling. Nearby, a projection of Thaaban kisses Rudaina's translucent pregnant belly. A melody echoes through the darkness, the same woman's hum. A faraway strand is getting brighter. An eye in the storm. The chaotic wisps calm as they near it.

The toddler turns to it. Hums along. Rudaina and Thaaban gasp. Directly at him. Through the void. The toddler keeps humming.

RUDAINA

Suhail?

Rudaina's ghostly arms carry the toddler. He reaches for the light behind her. She tries to hum the same melody. Her notes are off. Suhail looks at her. She gasps again, and puts him down. Strokes his hair.

RUDAINA

Suhail? Can you hear me?

She hums fragments of the melody. Her translucent form materializes within the void. The currents of light become gentle around her. Suhail finds her eyes. Rudaina collapses to her knees.

RUDAINA

This melody. It's breaking the curse.

Thaaban embraces her from behind. She looks back at him.

RUDAINA

I can't leave you two. Not now.

Thaaban pulls Suhail close. Holds him. He points to Rudaina's belly, then towards the void. Rudaina shakes her head.

RUDAINA

I can stand up to your mother.
Noura doesn't have to be
presented.

The distant hum fades. The void goes quiet. The wisps rage. Suhail cries. Thaaban crunches his face as wisps attack him. Rudaina looks around in horror, wisps blowing fiercely through them. She tries humming the melody. Off. Close enough. Suhail quiets. Thaaban calms. The currents still. Suhail hums along with his mother, correcting her notes. Rudaina's eyes go wide.

RUDAINA
I'm so sorry, my heartbeat.

Her ghost fades. Thaaban pulls him closer.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID - LATER

Suhail crawls through the void, pained, disoriented. Light strands scratch at him. Swirls of dissonant experiences blast through him like knives on metal. The light strands form a network of random pulsing nodes, connected like neurons in a brain. He keeps crawling through them, eyes shut, biting each step. A strand. A heel on sharp stone. Another strand. A hand drops its food.

The warm melody calls again, far in the distance. A man's voice this time. Aldebaran's. The currents gravitate towards it. Suhail hums along. Finds Aldebaran's notes as he crawls. The nodes between them resonate. A path opens. The whole network pulses in rhythm. Suhail fixes on the strand carrying Aldebaran's voice.

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - ROYAL CHAMBER - VISION

A kaleidoscope of flowers illuminates the palace walls behind metallic silk bed drapes. On the bed, a pregnant WOMAN. Tender. Hair spread. Sweat down her face. She wails, belly about to burst. Aldebaran holds her. He is humming the Melody of Warmth into her ear. And through the void. His terror is buried behind a stoic mask.

Beside them, a SEER boils water in a pot over flammable stone. Aldebaran turns to him.

ALDEBARAN
How long?

The Seer does not respond. Aldebaran kisses the woman's forehead. Bulges move around her belly, as if a baby is trying to rip it open from the inside. Aldebaran runs towards a facepiece attached to a transparent bag.

ALDEBARAN
Stay strong. You're almost through.

WOMAN
Kill me!

He runs back to the woman. Attaches the facepiece onto her. Brushes her hair as she breathes.

ALDEBARAN

Never.

The Seer ties the bag around the pot. It inflates with faintly iridescent steam. The steam moves through the hose, into the facepiece. The woman calms. Muted cries fill the room. From somewhere hidden. The woman exhales. Smiles. Pain-free. Aldebaran follows the sound. Puts his ear to her belly. The cries become clearer. The baby is crying.

From within the woman's womb.

ALDEBARAN

What's happening? Is our baby OK?

The Seer's mouth is open, eyes wide.

WOMAN

(whispering)

It's working. I'm feeling grea—

She gives birth to ALTAIR. In complete peace. Aldebaran carries his son as the Seer cuts the cord.

ALDEBARAN

Love! We made it! We have a boy!

She doesn't respond.

ALDEBARAN

Love?

He looks to the Seer. His eyes grave. Back to the woman.

ALDEBARAN

Love?

The sound of another crying baby echoes.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Far ahead of Suhail in the void, wisps of light coalesce and birth a radiant ball of light. Surrounding wisps are drawn into it. Suhail's eyes are drawn to it. A north star, off in the distance.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - CANOPY - TIME-LAPSE

Across a horizon of iridescent trees, day fades into night and night fades into day. Aireth rises and sets. Year after year. Its three moons positioned differently each time.

INT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - EXILED HUT - YEARS LATER

Straw walls. Suhail's body is a boy now. He looks exactly like Sada. He sits in an almost comatose state. Immobile. Mute.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Suhail walks through a storm of light wisps. Mist and heavy wind. Faces flicker through it. Voices overlap. He looks at the ball of light in the distance. Focuses on one of the strands near it.

VISION - FARD AND THE NEW WORLD MINISTERS

A boy. FARD. New World Ministers. AKRAB. MENKAR.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Light swallows the vision. The star is bigger. It pulls more strands near it. Suhail pushes on. He follows its wave of calm. A sound reaches from it. Ethereal synth plucks tracing a familiar melody. Suhail is entranced. Melody harmonizing. Percussion in syncopation. It calls to him. Pulsing. He pushes, one step at a time, hair blowing against the heavy winds.

His face shifts from emotion to emotion as he wades through the mist of experiences.

FLASHES - LIVES ACROSS AL-LAWHA

A child with chapped lips holds someone's hand. SHEIKH DENEH drinks from a full mug. A New World worker plunges sewage in a dirty bathroom. A New World artist turns on a vibrant flowerlight installation. A man sits alone in a restaurant. An old woman holds an old man's hand as they walk.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The melody is on its last notes. He is unbearably close to the light. It becomes magnetic and starts pulling him. Suhail's mouth opens. Wide eyes. Tries to turn the other way. He is pulled. Impossible to resist. Feet skidding. Surrenders. His face calms. The light swallows him.

The void transforms. Black nothingness to pure light. From within it, a hand extends.

ALTAIR (V.O.)
Need a hand?

Like a falling man thrown a rope, Suhail grabs onto Altair. A ghost of him is pulled out of his body. Out of the endless black void. Into the blinding white light.

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "Of the Seer Who Would Not See"

INT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - EXILED HUT - CONTINUOUS

Suhail's body gasps. Awoken. The world pours in all at once. Light and weight and shapes bleeding into shapes. The hut reveals itself around him. In the corner, Thaaban has gone still. He is staring at Suhail. Suhail's gaze drifts through the blur. It finds his father's eyes. His breathing slows. A blink.

He crashes into his father's chest. Tight. Tears stream down both their faces. And Suhail speaks for the first time.

SUHAIL
You are a hero, Baba.

Suhail pulls back. His face hardens.

SUHAIL
It was a lie. Mama was never
cursed.

Thaaban goes back in. His son holds him too. He doesn't let go until the Voice SCREAMS. Thaaban stumbles back. Suhail's face contorts. They both drop. Suhail holds his father's hand as they groan together on the muddy ground.

SUHAIL
Sheikh Mirzim.

He moans, gritting his teeth.

SUHAIL
You're feeling him too, aren't
you?

Thaaban trembles as he meets Suhail's eyes.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY

Thaaban leads Suhail. They crouch through knotted roots that form the Sacred Village entryway. Suhail smiles at the sparkling roots. His fingers glide over them as they pass. They step out to a sanctuary of woven huts surrounded by dense jungle. Male SEERS and their female CARETAKERS tend to their work.

A Seer carrying water. A Caretaker skinning a rodent. Girls laugh, playing, while boys wander with blank faces. Some hold hands. In the middle of the village, Seers and Caretakers sit on logs in a circle. At their head, the Elder is decorated on each arm with a large shimmering feather. She stands. Everyone stops what they are doing and turns. Thaaban and Suhail approach.

The Elder reaches out her hand.

ELDER

H-How?

Thaaban kneels in front of her, and grabs her hand to kiss it. She scans his eyes. Then Suhail's.

SUHAIL

You have forsaken the Stars!

The water spills. The rodent drops. Next to the Elder, an old Caretaker, FARASHA, rises over him. Her eyes pierce.

FARASHA

How dare you use this tone before
your Elder?

Suhail pays her no attention. His eyes remain on the Elder.

SUHAIL

You would condemn your own son?

Thaaban pulls Suhail back. Suhail turns to him.

SUHAIL

Trust me, Father.

Farasha stands between them.

FARASHA

Enough, child!

Suhail looks up at her.

SUHAIL

You were there.

He touches her.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Within the darkness, wisps of light connect between the Elder, Farasha, and the Seers.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The Seers shake. Farasha's eyes are elsewhere.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - VISION

Farasha stands next to the Elder, waist deep. They are both younger. A BABY is floating on a leaf. The Obelisk hums. The baby slips and sinks near tangled vines. A small bone hidden beneath.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Farasha jolts back. The Seers are fallen on the grass. The Elder's eyes bulge out of her.

ELDER

You dare curse us again?

Around them, the Caretakers embrace their men. Suhail looks around at the pained and worried faces. A voice echoes through him. Altair's.

ALTAIR (V.O.)

Breathe.

INTERCUT - THE VOICE / SACRED VILLAGE

Suhail breathes. In the void, the currents of wisps divert around the Seers into him. The Seers calm.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail turns back towards the Elder.

SUHAIL

You would claim you didn't know any better.

ELDER

Weigh your words, child!

He steps closer. Thaaban's eyes are wide.

SUHAIL
But your chest has always felt
heavy.

Step.

SUHAIL
Hasn't it?

ELDER
Silence!

SUHAIL
Release your burden.

The Elder's hands tremble. He grabs them.

SUHAIL
Breathe, Grandmother.

She collapses beneath Suhail, her hands still under his.

SUHAIL
It's OK. You're OK.

Altair's voice echoes over his. He holds her as he hums
fragments of the Melody of Warmth.

SUHAIL
The Stars keep moving. We must
move with them. Stop cursing our
children with the Voice. End our
cycles of Seers.

A silence takes them. Then, the Caretakers grab onto their
men.

CARETAKER 3
(shouting)
We'd be lost to the jungle!

A PREGNANT CARETAKER rubs her belly.

PREGNANT CARETAKER
Our lineage is Sacred!

Suhail walks to her and turns to a SEER holding her hand. He
looks at Suhail with eyes that ache. Suhail's eyes ache
back. The Caretaker grips her Seer's hand tighter. She has a
stern glare. Suhail meets it.

SUHAIL

Cousin.

He sees through her eyes. Then, Suhail grabs her arm.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The Pregnant Caretaker's form turns to see the fuzzy Seer next to her. He is being attacked by light wisps.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The Caretaker pulls her hand away. It trembles by her side.

SUHAIL

This is the agony you'd bind your child to.

Her Seer turns to her. He holds her hand again, and smiles. Suhail looks between them.

SUHAIL

What is your sacred lineage worth,
if this is its price?

Wind roars from above. Through the sanctuary's canopy, an ANQA dances in the sky, fully grown, shimmering wings the size of a tree. The villagers turn to Suhail, mouths open. Suhail walks between them to his father. They part around him. Suhail looks down at his grandmother. She is seated on a log, her head sunk in her hands. He kisses her forehead. Helps her up.

Thaaban's hand finds Suhail's shoulder. His chin lifts. Suhail nods and looks out at the Seers.

SUHAIL

Our stories have mutilated your voices.

Caretakers murmur over themselves.

SUHAIL

Yet I hear what you cannot speak.

Suhail looks at his father with reverence.

SUHAIL

And I swear.

He looks back to the crowd.

SUHAIL
You will be silent no longer!

His grandmother grabs his arm. Suhail turns to her. Her eyes are on his. And Suhail's on hers. Her grip loosens. She lets go, and looks ahead.

The Seers are bowing. Next to them, their Caretakers stand with crossed arms, furrowed brows, and confused glances.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY

The Elder follows Thaaban.

ELDER
You can't take him! He's too young!

Thaaban doesn't look back. He grabs Suhail's hand and continues walking towards the village exit.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Thaaban parts dense leaves open for Suhail. He ducks underneath them into an oasis of light. The Obelisk hovers in front of the pond. A weight lifts off their faces. A gust of wind above them. Golden light shatters into color around the Anqa. It flies down and sips from the iridescent pond.

SUHAIL
Whoa.

SUHAIL'S VISION - THE VOICE

Thaaban's trace flickers in the void. The wisps are drawn away from them into the Obelisk. They shoot up through its light, branching into a web of strands far above the canopy. Beyond, the network thins to points of light too distant to count. Stars. The void is black otherwise. There is no Anqa, or any other animal.

BACK AT THE POND

Suhail beams with joy.

SUHAIL
It's drawing the voices away from us!

Thaaban nods. Suhail takes a deep breath.

SUHAIL
I feel like I'm breathing for the
first time!

He runs. Wind blows through his hair. His arms outstretched.

SUHAIL
Woohooooooooo!

The light strands repel around Suhail's open arms as he runs. He laughs with exhilaration, running in circles around the pond. Nearing the Anqa, he slows his pace. Reaches out to touch it. It fluffs up its feathers. Shakes. And flies away. Suhail giggles.

SUHAIL
Not today, then.

He turns to the Obelisk. Peeks under it. It's levitating.

SUHAIL
This is amazing!

Something yanks his feet. Thaaban is sweating with fearful eyes.

SUHAIL
What's wrong?

He points at the Obelisk and shakes his head furiously.

SUHAIL
You're free here too. Why don't
you speak?

Thaaban opens his mouth. He strains.

THAABAN
I—

His brows furrow. Tries harder. A mumble.

THAABAN
Lo—

He shakes his head.

THAABAN
Lo—

Grits his teeth.

THAABAN
Lov—

He grunts. Stomps his feet. Eyes glassy. Suhail hugs him.

SUHAIL
I love you too, Baba.

Thaaban holds his son. His breath shudders over Suhail's. His eyes fall on the Obelisk. Thaaban pulls back and gestures for Suhail to follow.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - ISOLATED HUT - DAY

Thaaban leads Suhail to a hut far from the others in the village. The Elder shouts from behind them.

ELDER
I knew it! I told you not to take
him!

Thaaban chuckles and continues, ignoring her. Suhail notices the boys walking around aimlessly. He slows his pace. Thaaban grabs him, drawing his attention back. Suhail follows him into the hut.

INT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - ISOLATED HUT - DAY
- CONTINUOUS

An OLD SEER is crying on the floor. Suhail runs to him.

SUHAIL
Touching the Voice did this?

Thaaban nods and kneels next to the old Seer. He holds his hand and kisses his forehead. The sound of girls playing echoes from outside. Suhail turns to the door.

SUHAIL
This is why you keep the children
away?

Rage burns in his eyes. He storms out of the hut.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail approaches two BOYS staring at an ant in the grass. He crouches down to them.

SUHAIL
They must have it better.

They turn to Suhail. Their eyes see past him.

SUHAIL

That's what you two were thinking.

Suhail stands up and smiles down at them. Extends both his hands.

SUHAIL

Am I right?

They grab them.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - EXIT TUNNEL - DAY
- CONTINUOUS

A group of boys follow Suhail and Thaaban towards the village exit. The Elder and Farasha are chasing behind them. A CARETAKER points.

CARETAKER 3

They're taking our boys!

More villagers run after them. The Elder is behind the boys.

ELDER

Not one more step!

The boys continue to follow Suhail.

ELDER

Son!

Thaaban stumbles but keeps walking.

ELDER

I would exile you again.

He stops and looks back at the Elder. At his mother.

ELDER

Do not betray our Sacred—

Suhail pulls Thaaban ahead. Thaaban allows it, turning away from the Elder. Right as they approach the tunnel, Farasha yanks one of the boys, DOUB. She carries him back. He claws and wails like a bird being caged. Suhail turns, then approaches her.

SUHAIL

You would deny your son peace?

FARASHA

No, I would protect him!

She nods at the tunnel ahead.

FARASHA

You saw what the Voice can do.

Doub pushes on his mother's body and falls on the grass. Farasha clasps his arm. He doesn't stop trying to break free.

FARASHA

Risking a lifetime of torment for
a moment's pleasure is not peace.

Doub grunts in pain, trying to pull his arm free.

SUHAIL

Cousin.

Suhail stares into Farasha's eyes.

SUHAIL

What do you know of peace?

FARASHA

You overstep, child. I am your
elder.

Suhail breathes.

SUHAIL

In all the lives I've lived,
Farasha, I learned this. No Elder.
No Voice. Not even the Stars know
what's best.

He sees her hand. Her son's skin is pinched red between her fingers.

SUHAIL

Your boy is suffering.

Her grip loosens. Suhail looks into her eyes.

SUHAIL

Come with us. Let me show you.

Farasha lets her son go. He runs to Suhail and hugs him. The Elder stands nearby. Her arms crossed. Her breath loud.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY

One by one, the faded eyes of each boy return. Two of them holding hands look at each other, then let go. They start giggling.

SUHAIL

First around the pond wins!

Suhail bolts. One runs. Soon, all of them are chasing behind. A lap. Suhail leads. Doub trails closer, about to pass Suhail.

DOUB

Not fair!

Suhail trips. Farasha gasps. The boys slow to a stop. Doub flings his hand to his mouth as Farasha runs to him.

FARASHA

Doub? You can speak?

Doub looks around at all the dropped jaws. He looks at Suhail, fallen on the grass, and extends him a hand.

DOUB

Th... Tha—

Suhail takes his hand.

DOUB

Thank you.

And swallows Doub under his arms. Thaaban watches them. A smile blossoms on his face. Another BOY.

BOY 1

Not fair!

Another.

BOY 2

Rematch!

Suhail turns to them, laughing.

SUHAIL

Not my fault you're all so slow!

He drops Doub onto the grass and bolts again without warning. The boys laugh, chasing behind.

DOUB

Cheater!

Farasha approaches Thaaban. The sound of boys playing hangs between them. Until her eyes flood. Thaaban looks at her with pity.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY

The boys follow Suhail and Thaaban through glittering twisted roots. With each step, their smiles dull and their eyes fade. They crawl out of the tunnel into the village. Caretakers are screaming. Thaaban grunts. The boys fall. Suhail's eyes are shut. The Elder runs to him.

ELDER

You have angered the Voice!

Littered around the grass, the Seers are groaning. Suhail forces speech through his breath.

SUHAIL

This is. Not. My doing.

Caretakers run to their boys. They are clasping their heads in pain.

SUHAIL

The Greenlands. Their people fight amongst themselves.

ELDER

Why should we concern ourselves with the squabbles of outsiders?

The Elder looks around at her fallen men and boys in horror. One of the Caretakers looks up at Suhail. Her son is moaning in her arms.

CARETAKER 4

Please! Help us!

Suhail is groaning. He loses his balance. Breathes. Finds it. And stands on a tree stump.

SUHAIL

Sheikh Mirzim's usurper. Is. Torturing. New World captives.

The women turn to him.

SUHAIL

We feel. Everything. Things no Star. Should ever witness.

A Caretaker holds her son tighter. She whispers into his ear.

CARETAKER 4
Forgive me. I didn't know.

Thaaban is curled like a fetus. Suhail sits on the grass beside him, and wipes sweat from his face.

SUHAIL
This will pass, Baba.

He helps him up, Thaaban's weight over his small shoulder. The Caretakers look up from their fallen children. Suhail's face betrays his pain.

SUHAIL
The Voice.

He winces.

SUHAIL
Cries for this suffering to end.

Suhail grunts along with all the other Seers, as if they are being attacked.

SUHAIL
I know the way.

A CARETAKER stands.

CARETAKER 5
Show us!

Suhail struggles under Thaaban's weight. He is about to collapse. The Elder catches him.

ELDER
What would you do?

Suhail strains on her shoulder.

SUHAIL
We must. Save them.

ELDER
We must what?

The Elder catches a laugh in her throat. Suhail finds his balance and turns to her. The sound of groaning Seers swells between them. The edges of her lips quiver. Then they fall.

ELDER

How?

Suhail looks towards the sparkling roots.

SUHAIL

The sky sling graveyard. What they drop, we carry the rest of the way.

The Elder's feathers tremble. She falls back onto the log. The Seers and boys get up. Slowly. They shake their heads. Reorient themselves. Then, they look at Suhail. The boys swarm around him. The Seers breathe easier. Thaaban places a hand on Suhail's shoulder, a grin on his face. The Caretakers watch. Some with crossed arms. Some with open mouths.

The Elder parts the boys surrounding Suhail. She meets his eyes beneath her. Nods. She unwraps the Shimmering Feathers on her arms, and kneels. Head down. She presents them to the child before her. Suhail stares at the feathers. They refract light like a prism. He lifts the Elder's chin up.

SUHAIL

No.

And gently pushes her hand away as lightning cracks the sky.

INT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - TENT - NIGHT

Suhail sleeps on hay. Rain trickles overhead. Water drips slowly through the tent's woven fibers. Drip. He grumbles. Drip. He rolls over. Drip. A woman's hum.

Suhail jumps awake.

SUHAIL

Mama?

Thaaban snaps up next to him. Suhail is smiling with warmth.

SUHAIL

She's singing. Want to hear?

Thaaban tilts his head. Suhail touches him.

INT. NEW WORLD - RUDAINA'S BEDROOM - VISION

Surrounded by scrolls, Rudaina hums the Melody of Warmth alone.

INT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - TENT - NIGHT -
CONTINUOUS

Thaaban's eyes are swollen with tears.

SUHAIL
It's OK, Baba.

Suhail hugs him, humming the same melody.

INT. CARAVAN - WAGON - VISION

Metallic walls. NOURA sleeps, arms around her goblet drum.

INT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - TENT - NIGHT -
CONTINUOUS

Suhail pulls back.

SUHAIL
See, they are well.

Thaaban wipes his eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - TRAIL - DAY

Farasha wipes shimmering rain off her drenched face. She trudges through soil, holding Doub's hand. Doub walks with eyes unfocused. A bird calls. An insect buzzes. Something growls. Dense foliage obscures a long line of Seers. Suhail leads, far ahead. He turns to look at Doub's faded eyes. And makes a funny face. Doub forces a smile. Farasha glances down at him.

FARASHA
We can still go back.

Doub yanks his hand away from his mother and runs to Suhail. Farasha frowns. The backs of Suhail and Doub warp ahead of her.

FARASHA
How is this better for him?

Farasha trips over a branch.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - VISION

Farasha submerges. A baby is sinking. She grabs her.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - TRAIL - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Farasha stands up. Suhail is in front of her.

SUHAIL

You did not curse my mother. You
saved her.

Doub is looking up at his mother as the rain stops falling
around them.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - FLOODED BASIN - DAY

Suhail leads the group through sparser foliage. Ahead of
them, a horizon-wide basin filled with shimmering rainwater.
LIZARDS are sipping from it. Suhail turns, grinning.

SUHAIL

Anyone up for some lizard's tail?

The Seers approach the lizards behind him. They groan. Their
breaths are heavier. Farasha crosses her arms.

FARASHA

You really expect me to hunt all
those?

Suhail looks towards the Seers.

SUHAIL

Watch.

Farasha laughs at this. The Seers groan louder as lizards
scurry below them. Doub is half present. His gaze avoids the
lizards.

SUHAIL

Doub, come see.

Suhail gestures. Doub lifts his head, and approaches the
basin. A lizard skitters by his feet. Doub jumps back. He
grabs Suhail. Suhail nudges him forward.

SUHAIL

You don't need to be afraid of
voices you can't hear.

He crouches down to one of the lizards and places a hand by its feet. It climbs onto it. Suhail giggles, raising it close to Doub. Doub looks away, hiding his face.

SUHAIL

They won't hurt you, Doub.

Suhail turns to the groaning Seers.

SUHAIL

Their wild little rhythms can be soothing. Just listen.

They listen. Doub peeks between his fingers. The lizard pees on Suhail's hand.

SUHAIL

Ewww!

Suhail pulls his hand to his chest. The lizard rustles away. A Seer laughs. Then another. Until they are all laughing. Farasha sees Doub chuckling. Her face loosens. She looks around. All the Seers are crouched down examining the lizards with curious eyes, ignited by a new flame.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - FLOODED CRATES - DAY

Doub and Suhail swim between mossy crates. Feet march beside them, beneath the murky water. The last on the tips of her toes. Farasha is trying to keep her head up. A woven leaf bag hangs on a branch over her shoulder. It dips in and out of the water, a lizard wagging its tail through one of the gaps.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SLOPE - DUSK

The foliage grows sparser. The ground inclines steeper and steeper. More stone than green. Suhail is sweating, leaf bag over his shoulder. The Seers sweat behind, bags over theirs. The top of the slope blocks the horizon ahead. The canyon narrows, both ends in the same eyeline.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - DUSK

Suhail stops at the top. The ringed planet is half set, magnified over a treasure trove of broken crates. The rest of the group approach beside him. They look up. Pallets of crates zip up and down slings running in parallel from one side of the canyon to the other.

Farasha looks between the northern edge on her right and the southern edge on her left. The southern edge is lower in elevation, yet supplies still zip from it.

FARASHA
How are they running both ways?

Suhail points at one of the pallets slinging upwards, so small from their vantage below.

SUHAIL
Notice that pulley.

A pulley is flickering blue against the green of dusk. Hard to notice. Like a faint star. Farasha squints, following it soaring upwards.

FARASHA
Warden's Bloom?

Suhail nods.

SUHAIL
Flowered pulleys. The New World's invention.

Doub is staring at the slings. His eyes are more open than they've been. Suhail puts a hand on Doub's shoulder.

SUHAIL
The sky slings work better now.

Thaaban puts a hand on Suhail's. Suhail looks down at the graveyard of broken crates. Spices. Tools. Fabrics. He clicks his tongue.

SUHAIL
Still. What a waste.

Near the north wall, a sling grinds against its pulley. Sparks shoot. It flutters wildly before snapping off and crashing into the stone. The canyon echoes. Suhail gasps.

SUHAIL
He needs help!

The Seers turn northward.

SUHAIL
Quick!

They drop their bags and run, leaving Farasha behind in confusion.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - NORTH WALL - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

A SCAVENGER hangs off the cliff's edge by one hand, a heavy bag held in the other.

SUHAIL

Drop it!

Suhail is so tiny below. The scavenger looks down.

SCAVENGER

No! I need them!

Suhail shakes his head.

SUHAIL

They're the wrong type!

The scavenger's fingers are slipping.

SCAVENGER

You're lying!

Suhail turns to the Seers and points to two of them. One LONG-ARMED, one BROAD enough to anchor him. They nod and run. Suhail looks back up.

SUHAIL

Let it go! You will fall if you don't!

The two Seers run up a trail that leads to a wide gap. The scavenger hangs on its other side. Purple moss lights the canyon's wall between. The scavenger is about to slip. Doub grits his teeth. A bag of herbs bursts on the ground, scattering in the wind. The scavenger swings his free hand and grabs the thin ledge.

The long-armed Seer extends a hand over the gap as the broad one holds his weight back. The scavenger holds his breath. He's so high up. Fingers wearing out. The long-armed Seer locks onto the scavenger's eyes, his hand over the open gap. The scavenger presses himself up. The edge crumbles as he launches with his right hand, reaching with his left.

The long-armed Seer grabs it. The broad one rolls back onto his back, pulling them both to safety. The scavenger stands up. He's trembling. Peeks down. A laugh escapes him.

Down below, next to Suhail, Doub turns. And runs. Farasha is approaching with eight bags of lizard's tail she carried all on her own. She drops them. Doub leaps into her open arms.

INT. SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - PATCHED SHELTER - NIGHT

A patched wood-and-metal roof rattles with rain and hums to the zip of sky slings. The Seers are lying down. The scavenger is munching on lizard's tail. Farasha lies against a wall, weaving grass into baskets. Doub is sleeping on her lap. Suhail sits up from Thaaban's arms. The scavenger is muttering to himself.

SCAVENGER

He's just a child. What does he know?

Suhail approaches him. The scavenger looks up at the boy.

SCAVENGER

If what you claim about my medicine is true...

An involuntary breath seizes him.

SCAVENGER

I will be indebted to you for the rest of my—

Suhail places a hand on his shoulder.

SUHAIL

The Stars do not bind by debt.

The scavenger stops eating.

SUHAIL

But...

Suhail sees Thaaban. His father's eyes are not present.

SUHAIL

Could I ask you a favor?

The scavenger's brow tries to lift. His eyes are too heavy.

SUHAIL

Would you deliver a bag of lizard's tail to someone in the New World?

The scavenger stills.

SUHAIL

Her name is Rudaina.

Slowly, as if fighting inertia, he nods. Thaaban smiles under the purple flowerlight. The humming of sky slings stops. Suhail looks up at the pattering roof.

SUHAIL

Why must they stop at night?

Seers around the floor shiver. Farasha holds Doub like a blanket. Suhail looks around at them. And begins to hum fragments of the melody.

BEGIN MONTAGE - THE SOLACE OF SOLIDARITY

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - DAWN

As the ringed planet rises over the horizon, the Seers and scavenger shovel through broken crates. Shadows of sky slings whip through them. Suhail points at things. Fallen rope. Scrap wood. Metal. The Seers organize them into piles. Thaaban watches his son with awe. Suhail hands Farasha rope. He demonstrates a method of attaching it to her basket.

INT. SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - PATCHED SHELTER - NIGHT

Beneath the rattling roof and purple flowerlight, Suhail is humming. Searching for notes.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - DAY

Suhail hands the scavenger a bag of herbs. The scavenger takes them. He shakes Suhail's hand, then goes towards the north wall as a sky sling zips the opposite way.

INT. SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - PATCHED SHELTER - NIGHT

Thaaban's hand finds Suhail's. Suhail's melody is warmer, but his fragments don't stitch together.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - DAY

Farasha hands Seer after Seer bags of woven leaf and rope. They wear them on their backs as they collect from the abandoned crates. Dried fruit. Salt. Wine. Bandages. All sorts of New World tools. Doub finds a crate of toys. Farasha finds textiles, soaked from the rain.

Suhail finds a crate of daggers. His hand lingers over it. He closes the lid, and turns to a stack of spilled blank metal tablets. Tries to grab a few. Too heavy. He takes three.

INT. SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - PATCHED SHELTER - NIGHT

Suhail hums softer. He is lost to the melody.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN WALL - DAY

The group follows Suhail with their crude backpacks. The sky slings zip lower overhead as the canyon inclines. They approach the wall, not too high, but with no clear trail up.

FLASH: The scavenger making his way down the canyon wall.

Suhail points the way.

INT. SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - PATCHED SHELTER - NIGHT

Suhail reaches for a note. He holds it. The shivering Seers around him find their breath and go still.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN WALL - DAY

Purple flowers dot the stone. The group is small, midway up. They trudge across imperceptible ledges like mountain goats. Farasha sweats. She holds Doub behind her on the thin ledge, and looks down. They're so high up. She loses her balance. Doub pulls her close, stabilizing her.

INT. SKY SLING GRAVEYARD - PATCHED SHELTER - NIGHT

Farasha is asleep with an unfinished basket on her lap. The Seers are snoring. Suhail lies on his father's lap. From somewhere deep within the Voice, an oud echoes back.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE - DAY

Thaaban's hand extends down. Another hand reaches up. Suhail stands next to his father as Thaaban pulls a Seer up to the Southern Lands. That Seer reaches down. The Seers alternate. Pulling each other up. Until: Doub looks up. Suhail smiles down at him, his hand extended. Doub grabs it and is pulled up. Suhail looks back down.

Farasha. She gazes up at him, his hand open. Her eyes betray a flash of fear. She rejects the hand and climbs up on her own.

END MONTAGE

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - SERPENT'S EDGE - DUSK

The canyon's edge is steep behind the Seers. They face a field of waving orange grass, vibrant against the green of dusk. The striking colors reflect off Doub's wide eyes. Farasha places a hand on his shoulder. Nearby, Thaaban is holding Suhail's shoulder. To their right, Al-Lawha's western edge. Nothing but clouds. They turn left.

EXT. SLING FAUCET - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

Sparks shoot out the glowing pulley of an approaching sky sling. New World officials are running up to the incoming pallet. It halts right before it would've crashed into a massive metallic warehouse. A banner hangs from it: 'By merit, we advance!' Beside it, caravans are being loaded. Suhail points at one of them, marked by the Loom.

SUHAIL

That one would grant us passage.

INT. LOOM CARAVAN - WAGON - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

Suhail and Doub stand on the tips of their toes over stacks of shrubs. The shrubs fall under their feet as the wagon begins to move. Farasha turns to them.

FARASHA

Careful, boys!

Thaaban sees her. He smiles. She notices and looks away. The boys are looking out of the open wagon's metal. Sky slings zipping to and from the Sling Faucet fade behind the cloudy sky. The other end of the Serpent is beyond visibility.

SUHAIL

See those?

Suhail points to pallets being moved into caravans marked by the Chisel.

SUHAIL

Only half would make it to Star's Cradle.

Doub turns to him. Suhail's fist clenches.

SUHAIL

The usurper's bandits. Just
because the slings are faster—

Loud banging stops the wagon. Farasha turns to the door. It slides open. A squad of three New World soldiers, holstered vine whips sparkling with static, stand on dried grass. One of them bears the red petal of Squad Leader on his uniform. Farasha meets his eyes.

FARASHA

Hey.

The SQUAD LEADER steps up and pushes Farasha aside. The Seers hiss. They form a wall around Farasha. The Squad Leader holds up a hand.

SQUAD LEADER

This wagon is for New World
personnel.

He looks between the Seers as his Squad steps up from behind. The Squad Leader's eyes crunch over the sight of the men huddled around Farasha. Then they open wide.

SQUAD LEADER

Seers? Why are you here?

Doub raises a fist.

DOUB

To save the South!

Suhail grins, a hand on Doub's shoulder. The Squad's hard faces soften. The Leader turns to the Seers.

SQUAD LEADER

Who is your leader?

They look to Suhail. He steps up. The Squad chuckles to each other. The Seers don't look away from Suhail. Farasha shoots the Squad a harsh look. Suhail's gaze remains on their leader. Gentle. He stares through him. Then, a flicker.

SUHAIL

Adel?

ADEL pulls back. His Squad gasps.

SUHAIL

We share the same path.

Suhail extends a hand.

SUHAIL
I'm Suhail. Please, allow us to
accompany you.

His open hand hangs. The Squad looks between it and Adel.
Adel takes it.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - ORANGE HILLS - DUSK

Camel-led wagons snake their way through rolling orange
hills.

INT. LOOM CARAVAN - WAGON - DUSK - TRAVELING

The Seers are seated with the Squad in a circle. Adel is
staring at Suhail.

ADEL
This doesn't make any sense.

One of the Squad members, MOUDHI, turns to him.

MOUDHI
How else could he have known your
father?

ADEL
All he needed was my name. Think
of what the NWI is capable of.

His eyes are still on Suhail.

ADEL
Explain yourself.

Thaaban grunts, eyes snapping to him. Suhail carries Adel's
gaze.

SUHAIL
You know it to be true. Your
father, the executioner—

ADEL
Stop calling him that!

Thaaban launches up. Suhail pulls on his hand, bringing him
back down.

SUHAIL
My bluntness was unintentional,
sir. I apologize.

Adel unclenches his fist. Another of the Squad members,
FAISAL, is looking down.

FAISAL
I've only met one Seer before
today.

Farasha turns to him.

FARASHA
In the Buried City?

Faisal nods. Farasha's eyes open.

FARASHA
That's my son!

Doub is grinning next to her.

FARASHA
How is he?

Faisal looks up.

FAISAL
I couldn't tell.

Finds her open eyes.

FAISAL
He never spoke.

Farasha deflates.

FAISAL
I'm sure he's looked after. Sheikh
Aldebaran himself wouldn't go
anywhere without him.

Doub holds his mother's hand. Adel sees them.

ADEL
Something doesn't add up.

He turns to Suhail.

ADEL
If you could see everyone, why
don't you tell us how her son is
doing?

Suhail is looking up at the moving sky.

SUHAIL
Strange...

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

A radiant ball of light pulses like a star in the void. An
oud echoes from within it.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
I'm only just realizing...

INT. LOOM CARAVAN - WAGON - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

Thaaban holds his son's hand.

SUHAIL
I can't see the Buried City at
all.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - CARAVAN CAMP - NIGHT

The caravan is stopped on grass more grey than orange.
Purple flowerlight freckles faraway scattered stone
farmhouses. A line of hitched camels munches on shrubs. Doub
holds a pile of grass near one camel's mouth. It looks at
him. Gives it a sniff. Munches it from his hand. Doub
giggles.

The flames of the campfire illuminate couriers, travelers,
and New World officials. The Seers sit between them under
the vast starry sky. Fire reflects off vacant eyes. Laughter
swells around them. One TRAVELER turns to another, KAWKAB,
his face going red.

TRAVELER
Hush, they can hear you Kawkab.

A COURIER turns to Adel.

COURIER 1
This is our third attempt. If we
miss this shipment...I can't
afford—

Adel grabs his arm.

ADEL
My Squad is here for you. Your
goods will arrive.

His vine whip buzzes with static. He looks towards the darkness behind the caravan.

ADEL

Not much longer, we're only two days away from Water's Loom. Might even make it for the weaving festival.

Suhail is shivering next to them. Farasha approaches with a blanket patched together from the gathered textiles. She places it over Suhail's shoulders. He looks up at her with sunken eyes.

SUHAIL

Thank you.

Her lips curl the opposite way. She glances at Thaaban. He nods and holds Suhail's shoulder. Someone screams. The Squad jumps up, hands on their vines. Far on the horizon, a shadow approaches. A YOUNG GIRL. She cries.

YOUNG GIRL

Help!

Everyone but the Seers runs. The Seers instead turn away from the girl on the horizon, looking behind towards the caravan. A hand pulls Adel back. Suhail's. Adel yanks it off.

ADEL

What are you doing?

The Seers are groaning. Suhail puts a finger to his lips and points at the caravan.

SUHAIL

It's a trap.

EXT. CARAVAN CAMP - BEHIND THE WAGONS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Men, women, and children in tattered clothes are carrying supplies out of open wagons. All bear a weapon. Vine whips, metallic scraps, even a flowerbomb.

EXT. CARAVAN CAMP - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Adel looks at the girl. She's crying louder. His Squad waits for his command nearby. Then at Suhail. He nods. Adel gestures at Faisal to rendezvous behind the caravan. At Moudhi to watch the girl. They nod.

EXT. CARAVAN CAMP - BEHIND THE WAGONS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Adel follows Faisal to the caravan. They peek around it. All the wagons are emptied. There is no one in sight. They turn to each other, mouths hanging, then bolt towards the dark horizon.

EXT. CARAVAN CAMP - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Moudhi holds the wailing young girl. She flails her arms trying to escape. A COURIER shouts at Moudhi.

COURIER 2

Poor girl!

Another.

COURIER 3

Let her go!

A whip cracks the air like thunder. Light flashes from somewhere far behind the caravan. Suhail and the Seers hold each other's hands. They moan, their faces marked with the pain of combat. Another flash over black. Farasha is above Doub on the ground, his face crunched. A flash. Suhail grips Thaaban's hand tighter. The girl is still screaming in Moudhi's arms.

No more thunder. The girl stills. She looks up at Moudhi with a wicked grin.

YOUNG GIRL

Curse the Warden.

She spits.

YOUNG GIRL

Curse the New World.

The couriers turn to each other, then run to the back side of the caravan. The bandits left nothing.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - CARAVAN CAMP - DAWN

Ash blows from last night's dead campfire. The Seers wear their backpacks. Moudhi holds the girl's hand. They watch the caravan of empty wagons ride away into the rising ringed planet. Moudhi turns to Suhail.

MOUDHI

Daylight. We're clear to go.

Suhail nods. The girl laughs.

YOUNG GIRL
I'd rather die than lead you to
your criminals.

Moudhi yanks her hand.

MOUDHI
Behave yourself, girl.

She tightens her grip.

MOUDHI
No one's dying on my watch.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - ROLLING FARMLAND - DAY

Farmland hills roll towards a snow-capped mountain range on the horizon. The group marches small among them. Scattered around, fieldstones catch light like fallen stars. Suhail walks with his father.

SUHAIL
She's almost back in the New World
now.

Thaaban finds himself smiling.

SUHAIL
It's strange.

His pace slows.

SUHAIL
I remember Noura's nomination. I
remember her practicing for her
performance.

Suhail stops. He looks up at Thaaban.

SUHAIL
She's so amazing, Baba. I'll try
to connect you next time I hear
her.

Thaaban nods. His eyes are misty.

SUHAIL
But the second she entered the
Buried City...

Suhail shifts his lips to one side.

SUHAIL

Nothing.

Thaaban holds his shoulder. Beyond the hilltop ahead of them, stone farmhouses are surrounded by tall orange grass. Farasha and Doub come up behind them. Doub is playing with a toy ball in his hand. He throws it up.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - TALL-GRASS PATH - DAY

Catches it.

The group walks along a small dirt path between orange grass taller than all of them. The girl growls, trying to break away from Moudhi. She looks at Suhail leading ahead, then up to Moudhi. Back to Suhail.

YOUNG GIRL

You're not one of them, are you?

Suhail keeps walking ahead. The girl presses her lips.

YOUNG GIRL

Why are you helping them?

Moudhi pulls on her arm.

MOUDHI

Quiet, girl.

YOUNG GIRL

They're scum! All of them!

Suhail turns. Gentle. The girl falls silent.

SUHAIL

There is always a better way,
Haya.

HAYA's breath stops. Suhail continues walking. Haya's free hand trembles as she's led forward. Something squeaks. Haya turns. Doub is giggling. He squeezes the ball in his hand. It squeaks again. Farasha chuckles. He giggles some more. Moudhi nudges Haya forward. She allows it, walking with less resistance. A squeak. Moudhi clicks her mouth. Another squeak. Moudhi turns back at Doub.

MOUDHI

Stop that!

Doub sees Moudhi, then turns to his mother. He smiles and squeezes the ball. Squeak. The Seers break into laughter. Moudhi looks between them. Her brows are pinched. Her grip tighter. Haya looks up at her. A smile creeps onto her face. Squeak. Haya joins the group bursting with laughter. Thaaban and Suhail are not laughing. They walk ahead. Grave looks in their eyes.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - BARREN FIELD - DUSK

The ringed planet sets across a flat open field of dead plants. A barren oasis within the tall orange grass. Farasha approaches Suhail.

FARASHA

Suhail.

He doesn't turn. Just keeps walking ahead with his father.

FARASHA

Suhail!

Suhail jolts as if slipping out of a trance.

FARASHA

It's getting dark. We must rest.

Doub's stomach grumbles near her. The Seers are groaning. Suhail points to a stone structure in the distance.

SUHAIL

That farmhouse is abandoned.

He looks at Moudhi, who nods.

SUHAIL

I'll meet you there by daytime.

Farasha and the Seers break away from them as they continue walking ahead. Moudhi stops in front of Suhail, Haya still in her hand.

MOUDHI

What's wrong?

Suhail looks into Moudhi's eyes. He shakes his head. Her grip tightens on Haya. Haya winces.

HAYA

You're hurting me!

Moudhi gasps and lets go. She crouches down to Haya.

MOUDHI

I'm so sorry. Are you OK?

Haya weeps. Moudhi looks at Suhail, his eyes elsewhere. Then she gathers Haya against her, leaving the girl's hand free.

MOUDHI

Hush now. It's OK.

Doub taps Haya's shoulder. Haya turns, wiping her eyes. Doub's hand is extended with the squeaky ball.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - TALL-GRASS PATH - NIGHT

Haya slows down. Suhail, Thaaban, and Moudhi walk ahead of her between giant blades of grass. She looks at the ball in her hand.

HAYA

You should head back.

Suhail and Thaaban don't stop. Moudhi does. She turns.

HAYA

We— They hate you.

Haya throws the ball away.

HAYA

It's not safe!

Moudhi kneels to her. Takes her hand.

MOUDHI

Would you abandon your family?

HAYA

Please.

Haya avoids her eyes.

HAYA

They're gone by now.

Suhail's face is harder than before.

SUHAIL

They're not gone.

He continues walking. Moudhi stands.

MOUDHI

Come on.

Thaaban jumps. A cute furry ANIMAL scurries by his feet.
Haya squeals.

HAYA
A field bear!

She dives for it. Moudhi, Suhail and Thaaban stare at her holding the animal by its tail. It wriggles around trying to break free.

HAYA
What? They're delicious.

Haya snaps its neck and throws it into Thaaban's backpack. Suhail turns between Haya and Thaaban. He shrugs then continues weaving through the thick grass.

SUHAIL
Just a couple hundred more steps.

EXT. BANDIT FARMHOUSE - TALL GRASS - NIGHT

Between the blades of grass, Thaaban spots bandits laughing around a campfire. Suhail glances back at Moudhi and points at a stone farmhouse behind them. It is decorated in mandarin flowerlight. Moudhi nods.

MOUDHI
How's their patrol?

Suhail and Thaaban shake their heads.

MOUDHI
That bad?

Haya pulls on Moudhi's uniform.

HAYA
Please, go back.

Moudhi turns. Haya's trembling. Suhail is taking things out of Thaaban's backpack. Bandages. Dried fruit. The field bear. He turns to Haya and holds out the items.

SUHAIL
Would you help us, Haya?

Haya looks at the items in Suhail's extended hand, then up at Moudhi. She hesitates. Then takes them.

EXT. BANDIT FARMHOUSE - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Haya steps out from between the grass. She's carrying Suhail's gift. A MAN runs.

MAN

Haya!

Bandits around the campfire turn to her. Haya approaches slowly. Her hands shake. More bandits run out of the farmhouse to see. Women and children. The man stands tall above her. He slaps her.

MAN

You led them here, didn't you?

She screams, dropping the items.

EXT. BANDIT FARMHOUSE - REAR WINDOW - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Suhail and Thaaban flinch next to Moudhi as they approach the back of the farmhouse. Haya's voice is loud behind them.

HAYA (O.S.)

Stop underestimating me!

Mandarin light seeps out a single open window. Moudhi peeks inside. She throws her hands to her mouth.

INT. BANDIT FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Adel and Faisal are dangling upside down. Unconscious. Stripped of their uniforms. Lashes all over their bodies like lightning burns. Adel's blackened eyes flutter open towards Haya's scream. It echoes through the room. His face has a gash across it through one eye. He jolts. A hand is cutting the rope from behind.

MOUDHI

It's me, sir. We're here.

Moudhi wipes her cheek on her shoulder without lifting the knife from the rope. Thaaban is ducked behind the open window. Suhail peeks inside.

SUHAIL

Quick, they're coming.

The rope is thin. Moudhi continues cutting. A voice behind the front door.

MAN (O.S.)
Get back inside.

Adel slams onto the ground. Moudhi is on Faisal's rope. His body hangs still. Adel's hands and feet are tied. He struggles to stand up. Looks up at Moudhi trying to cut Faisal free.

ADEL
Leave him.

Moudhi keeps cutting. Adel tips onto his knees.

ADEL
Moudhi! That's an order!

The door blasts open. Moudhi drops the knife. Two BANDITS with metal spears barge in.

BANDIT
Criminals!

Moudhi's hand shoots to her holstered whip. It sparkles with static. She turns to Suhail and Thaaban, watching from the window.

MOUDHI
Save Adel!

And whips her electric vine, cracking the air with thunder. The bandits jump back, avoiding the whip. Suhail and Thaaban leap through the window. Moudhi steps forward with her whip, and the bandits step back with their spears. They thrust them. Suhail and Thaaban carry Adel on their shoulders and turn to the window.

SUHAIL
Wait.

Suhail stops.

SUHAIL
More are hiding behind it.

EXT. BANDIT FARMHOUSE - REAR WINDOW - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Two bandits are ducked behind the open window.

INT. BANDIT FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Moudhi cracks her whip and bandits step out the door. Like animals being herded. Adel looks up at Thaaban carrying him.

ADEL
Cut me free.

Thaaban sees the knife on the floor. Suhail runs for it. The two ducked bandits jump through the window. They see Suhail going for the knife. Crack! Moudhi whips her vine at the door, a choke point keeping the bandits from entering. Thaaban carries Adel to a back corner. Two more bandits jump in. Crack!

Moudhi is stabbed by a spear. Suhail grunts, hand to his chest as if he were stabbed himself. He leaps for the knife and launches up. Holds it like a trained master towards the two bandits right above him. He hisses, jabbing the air. They step back. The other two bandits join them. Crack! Moudhi is overwhelmed by the door. Blood spreads across her uniform.

The four bandits surround Suhail with the knife. Between their feet he spots Thaaban. He drops to the floor and slides the knife to him. They turn. Thaaban cuts the bindings around Adel's hands. Adel takes the knife as the bandits lunge for them. Suhail turns to the door.

SUHAIL
Moudhi! Back!

Crack! Moudhi backs up, letting more bandits in. She presses on her wound as she walks backwards, her other hand still on her whip. The bandits launch to tackle Adel. Thaaban runs for Suhail. Crack! Adel cuts his legs free and stands. He holds the knife towards the four bandits surrounding him. Crack! Moudhi's whip strikes a hair's width behind them. They jump apart.

Adel leaps through the opening. He runs towards a bandit coming behind Moudhi.

ADEL
The window!

Moudhi runs to the window just before the bandit is about to strike her. Adel lifts his knife to stab him. Suhail grabs his arm.

SUHAIL
No.

Adel's eyes are on Faisal's hanging body. For a moment, the room goes still. Suhail pulls on Adel and runs out the window behind Thaaban and Moudhi.

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - ABANDONED FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The stars are dimmer behind the clouds. Moudhi has one arm over Thaaban and another pressing on her bloodstained uniform. The grass opens to a small stone farmhouse over shorter grass, as if it had been cleared then left to grow again. Suhail approaches it.

SUHAIL
We're safe here.

INT. ABANDONED FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Hay beds line the stone wall. More than the space should hold. Flowers are wilted between the cracks, lightless. Thaaban lays Moudhi down. Suhail takes out bandages from his pack. He takes out wine. Thaaban holds Moudhi's hand. Suhail rips the bloodstained cloth from Moudhi's uniform. Adel watches.

Suhail stuffs the wound with a wine-soaked bandage. Moudhi screams. Thaaban puts his other hand over hers. He grunts with her. Grips her tighter. Suhail hands Adel the bandage.

SUHAIL
Hold this.

Adel holds as Suhail unrolls the bandage around the wound, bites it off, and hands an end to Adel.

SUHAIL
Make sure it's tight.

Adel begins tying both ends. Moudhi is in and out of consciousness. Thaaban is a blur over her. Moudhi turns to Suhail.

MOUDHI
H...Ha...Haya?

Suhail's expression remains blank. His eyes are elsewhere.

SUHAIL
We shouldn't.

He looks down.

SUHAIL
Her father loves her.

A hand on his shoulder. Adel.

ADEL
I owe you.

Without looking back, Suhail clicks his tongue.

SUHAIL
The stars do not bind by debt.
Adel chuckles.

ADEL
Are you sure you're a child?
Suhail doesn't reply.

ADEL
I guess they don't. But you've
proven one thing for certain. The
stars do listen.
FLASH: Faisal hanging in the bandit camp.
Suhail turns. Tears are streaming down his face. Adel's
breath shudders.

SUHAIL
I'm so confused, all the time.
Suhail reaches for air. Adel watches until he can't. He
embraces Suhail.

SUHAIL
I don't even know who to blame.
Suhail speaks into Adel's shoulder. Moudhi slides her hand
out of Thaaban's. She turns her head to them.

SUHAIL
Akrab, your Minister of Trade,
manipulates the markets. A path
shut, a caravan delayed. Suddenly
bread costs blood!
Adel finds himself nodding. Moudhi props herself up. Slowly.

SUHAIL
The Sheikhs too! Mirzim, Saif,
Mishal, all of them!
Suhail turns away.

SUHAIL
Dependent on the Reserve.
Corrupted by your experts.

Suhail looks at Moudhi. Her face is exhausted. He clenches his fist.

SUHAIL
Faisal would still be alive.

Moudhi grabs his clenched hand.

MOUDHI
What should be done?

It opens.

SUHAIL
I'm not sure. But it must be better.

An oud echoes behind his words. Adel is looking up, stroking his chin. Suhail turns to him.

SUHAIL
Can I borrow your knife?

INT. ABANDONED FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

The farmhouse sleeps. Cold stone swallows its snores. Suhail's legs are crossed, back against the wall. Adel, Moudhi, and Thaaban on hay beside him. A blank metal tablet on his lap. A knife in his hand. He carves out letters. Green light seeps from within the metal. In that faintly glowing green, it reads, 'On the Merit of Experts.'

EXT. SOUTHERN LANDS - SEERS' FARMHOUSE - DAY

The ringed planet hangs high over another stone farmhouse in a wide-open field. Seers move about it carrying supplies. Farasha is sewing pieces of fabric together. Doub is playing with a straw doll. They turn. Stumbling out the tall grass, Adel is clutching Suhail while Thaaban carries Moudhi. The Seers run to them. The broad one takes Moudhi's weight, another clearing the way inside. Farasha sees Suhail.

FARASHA
Oh, child.

She runs to him. Kneels. Touches his head to check his temperature. Suhail smiles at her.

SUHAIL
We're OK.

She peeks around him.

FARASHA
Where's the third one?

Suhail looks down.

SUHAIL
His name was Faisal.

Doub leaps for a hug.

DOUB
Suhail! I missed you!

Suhail's arms are limp.

SUHAIL
I missed you too, Doub.

He finds the strength to hug Doub back. Farasha notices Thaaban smiling. She finds herself smiling as well.

INT. SEERS' FARMHOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Doub pulls back from Suhail.

DOUB
Come, look!

Suhail follows. Purple moss lights the stone walls of the large room.

DOUB
We organized them just like you
were thinking.

Collected supplies are neatly set out in a grid across the space.

SUHAIL
You sensed what I wanted?

Doub laughs.

DOUB
You're so loud, we can all hear
you.

Farasha steps in with a slab of wood, her ledger. She marks it as a Seer places a jar of salt next to a pile of them.

FARASHA

Based on my tally, we should have
enough for one more of the
usurper's camps.

Suhail looks at Adel and Moudhi. Two Seers watch over them. He looks at the others moving supplies around the room. At Farasha, focused on her ledger. At Doub, placing his straw doll back into a pile of toys. Thaaban grabs his shoulder. Suhail nods.

SUHAIL

One is not enough. We must gather
more.

He goes to Adel and Moudhi.

SUHAIL

A caravan is passing soon. Your
wounds need urgent care.

Moudhi is barely conscious. Adel bobs his head. Without needing a word, the broad Seer lifts Moudhi onto his shoulder. The long-armed one approaches to help Adel. Adel swats his hand away and stands up on his own. He turns to Suhail.

ADEL

We will be better.

He extends his hand. Suhail shakes it. As Adel turns to go, Suhail catches his wrist.

SUHAIL

Will you take this to my mother?

He's holding a metal tablet.

SUHAIL

Layer one, quadrant four,
residence three.

Adel's eyes flick to the tablet. He opens his mouth.

ADEL

Rudaina?

Suhail's smile barely lifts over heavy eyes.

SUHAIL

And Adel. Keep an eye on Noura.
She still believes in you.

INT. SEERS' FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The Seers are congested under the purple glow of stone moss. Doub holds Farasha as he snores. Suhail rolls over next to Thaaban. A smile spreads under his shut eyes. He giggles in his sleep.

SUHAIL
Sabsab...good girl.

FADE TO BLACK.

BEGIN MONTAGE - SUHAIL'S LETTER / THE FIRST OUTPOSTS

INT. SEERS' FARMHOUSE - LATER

SUHAIL (V.O.)
Dear Mama.

The Seers pack supplies into crates. Farasha weaves pieces of fabric together.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
You were right to leave. You saved
Noura.

INTERCUT - SUHAIL AND THAABAN / MUSIC CONSERVATORY

Thaaban takes Suhail's arm.

INT. NEW WORLD - MUSIC CONSERVATORY - VISION

Noura sits over a large metallic dome. The DIRECTOR lifts a finger.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
But I missed you.

EXT. GREENLANDS - ORANGE HILLS - DAY

The Seers lift a palanquin stacked with crates. They carry it over a steep orange hill. An emblem marks each of them. Three stars.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
Even far away, the melody, your
voice, guides me to you.

EXT. GREENLANDS - BANDIT HIDING PLACE

A group of bandits are hidden behind tall grass. The Seers place crates nearby.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
And your scrolls. Their stories
give me somewhere to rest.

EXT. SEERS' FARMHOUSE

Farasha pitches a tent next to the farmhouse. It is made of her patched fabrics.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
I understand Sufra, she feels like
a friend.

EXT. CHISEL CARAVAN - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

A caravan marked by the Chisel. A warm campfire. Travelers chattering. The Seers approach with raised hands. A New World squad stands guard, hands on their vine whips.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
Keep reading her stories, we are
listening.

INTERCUT - SUHAIL AND THAABAN / MUSIC CONSERVATORY

WITH SUHAIL AND THAABAN

Thaaban's hand is still on Suhail.

INT. NEW WORLD - MUSIC CONSERVATORY - VISION

Noura's drums swing. The musicians around her groan.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
Baba is well.

EXT. CHISEL CARAVAN - CAMP - NIGHT

The squad nods to Suhail. The Seers put their hands down. The caravan rides away as crates are placed where it was. Doub fixes a plank of wood over them. Etched onto it: 'The stars listen.'

SUHAIL (V.O.)
He doesn't go a day without
missing you.

Bandits approach the crates. They look between each other
and shrug.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
And Grandmother. She is sorry.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SKY SLING GRAVEYARD

Suhail picks up a fallen pulley. The Seers stand next to
him. A large pile of abandoned pulleys between them.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
I promise things will be better.

INTERCUT - THAABAN / MUSIC CONSERVATORY

WITH THAABAN

Thaaban wipes his blank eyes.

INT. NEW WORLD - MUSIC CONSERVATORY - VISION

Noura's drumming explodes into colorful polyphony.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
Wherever I walk, I am still
walking towards you.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - WALL

Suhail plucks a purple flower from the canyon wall. He wraps
it around a device. Attaches it to the pulley. It starts
spinning.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
I love you, Mama.

INTERCUT - SUHAIL AND THAABAN / NEW WORLD

WITH SUHAIL AND THAABAN

Suhail is still holding Thaaban's arm.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)
That's enough, Noura.

The Director's voice echoes. Suhail lets go. Noura's drumming stops. Thaaban shudders, smiling. Suhail grabs him again. Thaaban's eyes land elsewhere.

VISION - RUDAINA

Rudaina reads from a scroll on the crystal table.

WITH SUHAIL AND THAABAN

Tears stream down Thaaban's face.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
Long ago, in an age before the
cycles, there lived a small ant
named Sufra.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE

The Seers attach flowered pulleys to the canyon's edge.
Empty crates hang over the sky sling graveyard far below.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
She was a worker. The smallest in
her colony.

Seers gather supplies from the graveyard. Crates zip up and
down the south wall.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
One day, the ground roared like
thunder.

EXT. GREENLANDS - CARAVAN

Suhail approaches a caravan. The Seers stand behind him with
a palanquin of crates.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
"Listen!" Sufra said. But the
workers couldn't hear her. They
were too focused on their work.

INT./EXT. SEERS' FARMHOUSE - DOORWAY

A family knocks on a door. Three stars are etched onto it.
Farasha welcomes them in.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
She ran alone towards the thunder
and found an army of men. They
were marching towards her colony.

EXT. SEERS' FARMHOUSE - TENTS

The farmhouse is surrounded by tents. Farasha leads a family to one of them. Doub hands their child a straw doll.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
Sufra raced back to her home. She
had to warn them of the incoming
men.

EXT. GREENLANDS - CARAVANS

Suhail approaches another caravan. There are more people behind him. Not Seers. FOLLOWERS.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
Sufra's warning reached the
colony's queen herself. "We must
do something," Sufra said.

More caravans. More warnings of bandits. More crates left for them.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
With pity in her eyes, the queen
announces, "We are too small for
the hearts of men."

INT. GREENLANDS - FAMILY HOME

A child stands up from his sick mother. He walks to the door with a stone in his hand and scratches the wood with it. Hard. Marking it with three stars.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
Sufra pled with her queen. "Do
something! Please!"

EXT. GREENLANDS - FIRST OUTPOST

Seers nail scrap wood and metal together. A makeshift shack. A sign with three stars. The first outpost.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
 One by one, other ants joined her.
 "Save our home!"

EXT. GREENLANDS - MARKED DOOR

A large man shoves a small man pointing to a door. He raises an axe at the three stars etched onto it. Swings, breaking it into pieces.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
 Their small voices combined into one.

EXT. GREENLANDS - SECOND OUTPOST

Doub runs between Seers carrying crates out of a second outpost. Suhail holds a device. Noura's Time Keeper.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
 Together, they were so loud, even the queen found herself chanting.

EXT. GREENLANDS - TRAVELING

Suhail marches with his followers. Barrels of water. Clothes. Fruit. The Time Keeper flaps in his hand as he walks. Thaaban walks next to him with a piece of parchment. The Time Keeper buzzes. Thaaban marks the parchment.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
 "What's that sound?" one of the men said, stopping. "Watch out for that anthill," said another.

EXT. GREENLANDS - NETWORK OF OUTPOSTS - NIGHT

Suhail. Thaaban. Doub. Farasha. Outpost after outpost after outpost. The Seers color the Greenlands' nighttime in a network of purple flowerlight. Suhail shuts his eyes. The network of outposts pulses out of sync. The Time Keeper flaps in his hand. The outposts synchronize, pulsing together.

RUDAINA (V.O.)
 And they marched another way.

INSERT - SUHAIL'S MAP - YEARS LATER

A parchment map of Al-Lawha. The outposts are dotted across the Southern Lands. Ink brushes over Star's Cradle in the southern highlands. Up to Water's Loom in the eastern riverlands. Suhail marks a new outpost just west of it. WIDEN TO REVEAL Suhail, now a teenager.

EXT. GREENLANDS - HAYA'S HOME

A young woman runs to her father carrying a crate with three stars. Haya. Her father looks down at it. His arms are crossed. She opens it. A pile of supplies. Resting on top of them, the squeaky ball. Haya's breath shudders.

HAYA
The Voice of the Stars is real.

END MONTAGE

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - STREAM OUTPOST - DAY

Greener grass. A thin stream. An outpost of wood and woven fiber. Tents pitched all around it. Doub looks up from his ledger. His facial hair is patchy. He watches over Seers filling barrels in the stream, a Time Keeper and ledger in his hands. Followers are fishing next to them. The Time Keeper glows. Doub marks the ledger.

Suhail is checking up on followers behind him. He hands a woman fresh cloth.

SUHAIL
For the bleeding.

She takes it. He grits his teeth. Turns. The Seers are shaking. Doub is convulsing on the grass. Suhail shuts his eyes.

SUHAIL
No!

Farasha runs to Doub. Followers run to the Seers. Suhail braces.

SUHAIL
Stop!

The woman who received cloth holds Suhail's hand. She hushes him gently. Suhail opens his eyes. He's crying. The Seers calm down. Followers turn to him. He wipes his eyes.

SUHAIL

Your usurper was stabbed to death.

They turn to each other with gasps, grins, and held breaths.

FARASHA

Little heart.

Farasha helps Doub up.

FARASHA

Are you OK?

Doub slowly nods, then looks towards Suhail.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - TREETOP - NIGHT

Suhail and Doub sit on a thick branch. Their feet dangle so high up its vast tree. To their right, the southern highlands. Melted ice runs down them, splitting into streams. Most of the streams crash together into a wide river, breaking through stone ahead. Water's Loom.

The river weaves between its domed towers. It reflects the greens of overgrown foliage and the mandarin of flowerlight. Doub points at the highlands where the streams split.

DOUB

The water is flowing slower.

He traces it to where it thins near their outpost.

DOUB

The Voice will get louder.

Suhail's eyes are somewhere else.

DOUB

Suhail?

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The radiant ball of light is larger in the void. Deep within its light, a shadow flickers.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - TREETOP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Doub grabs Suhail.

DOUB

Suhail.

Suhail's eyes come back.

SUHAIL
Fard?

DOUB
What?

SUHAIL
I-I'm not sure.

Suhail is lost in the view. Starlight swirls through eddies in the water beneath the ethereal city. He turns to Doub.

SUHAIL
What does the Voice feel like to you?

Doub scratches his patchy beard.

SUHAIL
Please. Try.

Doub shuts his eyes.

DOUB
It's like...

His scrunched face shifts, unable to settle.

DOUB
Like so many melodies.

He tilts his head.

DOUB
But there's a wall of drums.

Doub opens his eyes.

DOUB
I feel it. I just don't see it like you.

Suhail is looking away.

DOUB
How do you bear it?

SUHAIL
Deep within the voice...there's a warmth.

As a cold breeze passes, rustling the leaves of the treetop, a man and a ghost laugh through the Voice. Suhail turns, his eyes wet.

SUHAIL
Almost like an echo.

The Melody of Warmth echoes from the faraway oud. Suhail shuts his eyes. Humming. Tracing the notes. Until he finds another fragment of the Melody. Doub falls still. He places an arm around Suhail as they gaze out towards the woven city.

INT. NEW WORLD - CRYSTAL TOWER - LAYER ONE - VISION

The city becomes the crystal tower. Noura, ALIA, and TAREK are seated on a bench looking at schematics of a dam.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - TREETOP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Suhail turns to Doub.

SUHAIL
The river. We can build a dam.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - ROPE BRIDGES - DAY

Narrow rope bridges stitch over a wide roaring river as if the river itself is being woven shut. Beyond them, a stone wall rises. Carved into its face, the skyline of Water's Loom. Streams thread the city. They fall through it in tiers. Aqueducts. Channels. Waterfalls between carved towers. And it blocks the eastern edge of Al-Lawha entirely.

Farasha passes Suhail with wide eyes. Instead of looking up at the city, she crouches over the bridge's knitted floor.

FARASHA
It's beautiful.

She admires its intricate woven patterns. She smells it.

FARASHA
Grass. Camel fur.

Feels it.

FARASHA
Some kind of coating?

Farasha stands and steps onto it. It wobbles. Doub follows her. Then Thaaban. Suhail is looking towards the Serpent on his far left, where the city follows the river. He looks right, where couriers carry supplies out of parked caravans. They wobble across the bridges with crates on their heads. A traveler brushes past Suhail onto the bridge. Farasha, Thaaban, and Doub are already halfway across.

SUHAIL

The bridges should be wider.

He steps on.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - TIERED WATERWAYS - DAY

Doub leans on a railing. He reaches for water flowing down a waterway over their heads into a stream below. He drinks from his cupped hand. Thaaban can't stop looking around. A maze of tiered waterways weaves through overgrown stone buildings etched in geometric patterns. Balconies jut out at every level. Doub fills his cupped hand again. He flings it on Suhail.

SUHAIL

Hey!

Suhail turns to Doub. Doub makes a funny face. Suhail laughs, reaching for the water. Farasha pulls him back.

FARASHA

Careful! You might fall!

Water splashes her. She squeals, soaked. Thaaban laughs, his hands wet.

FARASHA

Thaaban!

Suhail and Doub burst out laughing. The narrow streets are busy with people. Kids running around. People walking and eating. Couples staring off balconies. Some stop to stare at their woven-leaf clothes. On the highest tier of the city, a large domed building sits. A rainbow hangs over its flowing water arteries. Suhail is looking at it.

SUHAIL

Sheikha Layla awaits.

INT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT - DAY

They enter an open forum. Its high domed ceiling dwarfs them. Light leaks through crystals studded within it like stars. Thaaban and Doub are looking up with wide eyes. Farasha is looking down, her eyes wider.

Lining the entire floor is a tapestry of patched fabrics, each a work of art, woven with mesmerizing patterns and a kaleidoscope of ancient stories. Throughout the space, people converse. Some standing. Others seated on benches lining the walls. One turns to another.

PERSON ONE

The Greenlands are leaderless. It could get worse.

A voice from elsewhere.

PERSON TWO

That fool had it coming.

Between the chattering people, servers walk with kettles and cups. Someone shakes their head. Suhail listens.

STANDING PERSON

They named a Messiah as they stabbed him.

Suhail turns away. A SERVER approaches the group.

SERVER

Tea?

He extends a cup. Doub snatches it.

DOUB

Yes, please.

The server pours. Looks at Thaaban's clothes.

SERVER

Where do you come from?

Thaaban tries to speak. Grunts. Farasha puts a hand on his shoulder.

FARASHA

He's a Seer.

SERVER

A Seer?

The server sees Suhail. His brows furrow. Then they open.

SERVER
You're him!

Suhail smiles.

SUHAIL
Would you tell our Sheikha we're
here.

The server runs off. Doub sniffs his cup. Takes a sip. The room falls silent. The palace guests part. SHEIKHA LAYLA is in a flowing dress woven with complex geometric line art. She walks towards Suhail's group. Suhail approaches her. Everyone's looking.

LAYLA
A little young for a Messiah.

They meet beneath the dome's center. Crystal light scatters between them. Suhail extends a hand.

SUHAIL
I'm Suhail.

Sheikha Layla looks at his open hand.

LAYLA
Why are you here, Suhail?

Suhail puts his hand down.

SUHAIL
You know why.

LAYLA
Do you mock me, child?

Suhail shakes his head.

SUHAIL
Of course not, my Sheikha.

A moment.

SUHAIL
The Greenlands are lawless.

Sheikha Layla holds his eyes.

LAYLA
They called your name as the
usurper was killed. I see your
game, and I will not take part.

Suhail steps closer.

SUHAIL

I do not aim to take his place as
you imply. In fact, I want you to.

Sheikha Layla fails to hide her surprise.

SUHAIL

My Sheikha, I did not plan his
murder nor do I condone it.

Layla's gaze hardens.

SUHAIL

We need your help.

She looks between Thaaban, Doub, and Farasha behind him.

LAYLA

We?

Suhail gestures. Sheikha Layla looks. A third of the crowd
are bowing. Sheikha Layla looks back at Suhail.

LAYLA

What are you?

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - DAY

The court balcony is completely hidden behind the city's
largest waterway. Layla sits at the head of the grand table.
Water falls behind her. The flow catches grains of colorful
crystals studding the stone. Suhail sits across from her.
Translucent daylight from outside the water's veil brushes
the blue flowerlight within it.

LAYLA

I didn't believe them at first,
but it became hard to ignore the
stories.

Layla leans back.

LAYLA

The Stars Listen, huh? But, why a
dam?

Suhail stands.

SUHAIL

That water behind you.

A GUARD by the door places a hand on his dagger. Suhail walks to the waterfall.

SUHAIL
Where does it end up?

LAYLA
Everything leads to the river.

SUHAIL
Yes, but what does the river lead to?

Layla rolls her eyes.

LAYLA
Get on with it. What are you trying to say?

SUHAIL
It flows off Al-Lawha's edge. Wasted.

Suhail holds out a hand. She looks at it. Hesitates. Accepts. Suhail helps her up. They lean off the balcony's rail. The city breathes with mandarin light behind the curtain of water. Suhail reaches his hand into it.

SUHAIL
Feel it.

Layla holds her hand to the water. She struggles to keep it level.

SUHAIL
That weight. The New World found a way to use it.

She pulls back her hand.

LAYLA
What do you mean, use it?

SUHAIL
It's called a generator. Only theorized, never been done.

Layla's eyes fall.

LAYLA
How do you know it would work?

SUHAIL
I don't. But it's worth trying,
don't you think?

The water reflects off Layla's eyes.

LAYLA
What good is using the water's
weight to me?

Suhail leans closer.

SUHAIL
Your city's mandarin flowers will
die soon. It would recharge them.

Layla puts her back on the rail.

LAYLA
There's enough Warden's Bloom in
the Buried City for the whole
world now.

SUHAIL
Yes, but how many caravans would
that take?

Layla opens her mouth to speak. Then doesn't. Suhail turns
to the door.

SUHAIL
Baba?

The guard blocks Thaaban from coming in. Layla gestures.
Thaaban passes. Suhail meets his father's eyes.

SUHAIL
Let him show you.

Thaaban extends a hand to Layla. She stares at it in
confusion.

LAYLA
Is this a trick?

Suhail smiles.

SUHAIL
I wish it was.

She grabs it.

VISION - OUTPOSTS / DRYING GREENLANDS

Sounds of people alive with joy. The network of outposts pulsing in sync. Dried grass. A thirsty child.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Layla snaps her hand away. The guard is holding a dagger to Suhail's neck.

LAYLA
It's not about my lights. It's
about their crops.

The guard presses the dagger closer.

LAYLA
About your network.

Suhail looks away. The dagger nicks him. Barely louder than a breath.

SUHAIL
No.

The guard holds Suhail tighter, waiting for Layla's command.

SUHAIL
The streams are drying. Rain has
been coming slower.

Suhail's face hardens.

SUHAIL
It's about everything!

Layla exhales.

LAYLA
Let him go.

INT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT - DAY

Farasha's face is on the floor examining the carpet.

LAYLA
A fellow weaver.

Sheikha Layla stands above her. Farasha stands up quickly.

FARASHA
M-My Sheikha!

She fixes her hair.

LAYLA
Suhail tells me you have an eye
for fabrics.

Thaaban and Suhail stand behind her.

FARASHA
They're truly amazing, Sheikha.

Sheikha Layla smiles.

LAYLA
You should come back for the
festival. Our most talented young
weavers will be competing.

Nearby, Doub extends his cup to a server for a refill. He's
tweaking with energy.

LAYLA
We still remember the ancient
patterns.

Layla looks away.

LAYLA
It's a shame. Even the Buried City
lost this art.

Her eyes fall back on Farasha.

LAYLA
And your own weaving?

Farasha blushes.

FARASHA
Oh no, these works are beyond
anything I can—

DOUB
Mama's tents are better!

Doub jitters reaching for another refill. Farasha snatches
the cup from his hand, hushing him. Sheikha Layla laughs.

DOUB
It's true!

Doub looks at the carpet.

DOUB
What's so special? They're just
shapes.

FARASHA
Doub!

Farasha squeezes his arm. Sheikha Layla crouches down to Doub. He's almost jumping up and down from the caffeine.

LAYLA
Suhail tells me you can feel the
world.

Doub kicks his feet.

DOUB
It's annoying.

LAYLA
Can you feel the past?

DOUB
No, that's impossible.

She looks up to Farasha and winks.

LAYLA
Maybe your mother can teach you
how.

Farasha smiles. Nearby, Suhail laughs at something his father gestures at, a server filling their cups with tea. The cups drop from their hands. Doub, Suhail, and Thaaban collapse.

Layla lurches back from Doub panting on the rug.

LAYLA
What's happening?

Guards and guests crowd around them.

SUHAIL
Flowers. Dimming.

Suhail is fighting for breath.

SUHAIL
The air.

He gasps.

SUHAIL
We can't breathe!

Sheikha Layla holds his hand. And in an instant, they are back to normal.

LAYLA
What was that?

Layla helps Suhail up.

SUHAIL
I-I don't know.

Suhail sees Thaaban struggling to stand.

SUHAIL
Baba?

Thaaban props himself up and swallows Suhail under his arms. Suhail trembles under his father's embrace. Sheikha Layla is staring at them. She snaps her fingers.

LAYLA
Jassim!

Her ADVISOR salutes with attention.

LAYLA
Suhail will honor us with his presence. Show his party to the Guest Chambers.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - UPPER TIER - DUSK

Suhail's fingertips brush against coiled vine railings. JASSIM leads them along mandarin-lit walkways overlooking the city.

Below, the Loom does not settle. Tiers rise and fall at impossible angles. Bridges cross other bridges that cross stairs that climb to balconies that overlook lower towers that themselves rise above other balconies. Water threads through all of it. A waterfall here. A channel there. A stream looping back on itself, somehow flowing both up and down at once.

Suhail looks out at the drowning city, almost level with the setting ringed planet. His gaze jumps between the overlapping tiers. Doub, Thaaban, and Farasha lean on the overgrown rails next to him. They look down. A town square is surrounded on all sides by water. Rope bridges extend out of it and into the encircling streets.

A man at its crowded center catches Suhail's attention. He is playing a merry song on a stone flute. Doub pulls on his mother's hand.

DOUB
I'm hungry.

Jassim approaches behind them.

JASSIM
Do you like soup?

Doub's stomach rumbles.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - FOOD MARKET - DUSK

Vined mandarin flowers glisten over people eating and drinking. Fishes and breads and wines. And soup. Farasha's eyes hang on a stone fountain sculpted as a woman weaving. They walk around it. Doub's eyes are ahead. A row of food stalls carved into the city's stone. Jassim points to one with an especially long line. He's grinning.

JASSIM
What did I tell you? The best in
the city!

Doub and Thaaban run to stand in line. Farasha stops before patterns on the wall. Like the ones from the carpets. Suhail turns to her.

SUHAIL
What do you see in them?

Farasha rolls her eyes.

FARASHA
You already know what I see.

He looks off towards Thaaban and Doub waiting in line with Jassim. Then to the complex tiling pattern on the wall. He gets close to it.

SUHAIL
To see one star is not to know the
sky.

Farasha smiles at that.

FARASHA
These patterns are sacred.

Suhail notices repeating cells of the same set of patterns.

FARASHA
See this patch.

She points to a simple repeating cell.

FARASHA
On its own, it's meaningless. Easy
to weave.

A hand places gems on a stone counter. Another hand replaces
them with a cup of soup.

FARASHA
But taken together...

Farasha steps back. Suhail follows.

FARASHA
Something new emerges.

The cells seen together form a more complex, interlaced
pattern of mesmerizing geometric shapes.

FARASHA
Like our own lives, they carry
truths that wait to be woven.

Noura's drums flutter through the Voice. An oud echoes
warmth beneath them. Suhail steps back another pace.

DOUB
Mama, try the soup!

Doub holds out a cup between them.

DOUB
It's the best thing I've ever
tasted!

Thaaban nods, holding a cup out for Suhail. Farasha places a
hand on Suhail's shoulder. They accept the soup.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT

They step onto a ledge near the top of the city. Behind
them, a stone arch bridge crosses a narrow gap. Water falls
through it. On the other side, steps climb back into the
city. The ledge is otherwise empty. At its back, the guest
chamber is carved out of the Loom's stone.

Jassim holds the door open as Thaaban, Doub, and Farasha
enter. Suhail stops before entering. He turns to Jassim.

SUHAIL
Thank you for your hospitality,
Jassim.

Jassim dips his head.

JASSIM
It was my pleasure, sir. I hope
you enjoyed the soup.

Suhail shuts the door, leaving them both outside.

SUHAIL
Despite your treason, you've been
good to Layla.

JASSIM
Sir?

SUHAIL
New World Intelligence?

Suhail smirks.

JASSIM
You must be mistaken.

Jassim's thumb finds his dagger's hilt.

SUHAIL
Menkar is expecting a report soon.
He will know that I am real, but I
hope your impression of us remains
honest.

Jassim's eyes widen with horror.

SUHAIL
Don't worry, I won't reveal your
station. You're a good man.

Suhail's smirk drops.

SUHAIL
But could you tell me something?

Jassim's mouth opens to speak. Slowly.

JASSIM
W-What is it?

Suhail looks towards the starlit city. The sounds of lively
people over flowing water are tangled. He turns back to
Jassim.

SUHAIL
Who's Fard?

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - NORTHEAST STEPS - DAY

The stone steps are wet with mist. Sheikha Layla holds the rails as she climbs, careful not to slip. Jassim leads with Suhail and Thaaban. Doub looks out at the river raging far below. They climb in a slow spiral above the city's northeast edge. The river curls before leaving Al-Lawha entirely. Beyond it, the Serpent's Canyon. Doub skips steps catching up.

DOUB
How much higher?

Layla turns.

LAYLA
It's worth the hike, child. The
World's Edge may draw bigger
crowds, but—

Layla slips. Doub holds her steady as she catches the rail. Jassim runs down to help Doub. The Sheikha composes herself before he arrives. Jassim puts a hand on Doub.

JASSIM
Thank you.

The Sheikha continues walking. Suhail is looking out as he walks. Where the river bends, a smaller stream breaks away from it and falls into the canyon. He turns to his father and points.

SUHAIL
The Valley's river.

Thaaban follows the line of his finger.

SUHAIL
Mama loved that place, didn't she?

Thaaban smiles and nods.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - WATERFALL VIEWING PLATFORM - DAY -
CONTINUOUS

A raised platform busy with people leaning over the rails. The people go silent, leaving behind only the water's roar. They turn and murmur.

PERSON THREE
Our Sheikha is here.

Another hushed voice.

PERSON FOUR
Is that him?

Sheikha Layla arrives at the platform's center. Jassim puts an arm out between her and an approaching crowd. His other hand is on his dagger.

JASSIM
Carry on.

They break away. Beyond the rails, the roaring river falls over an unending horizon of clouds. The waterfall's end disperses like mist over them, casting a permanent rainbow. Doub holds a hand into the spray. Suhail watches the water disappear beyond the edge. Thaaban places an arm around both boys. Suhail turns to Layla.

SUHAIL
It must be done, Sheikha.

He extends his hand.

SUHAIL
Together, we would save so many
lives.

Her eyes go north, towards the Serpent.

LAYLA
I can't accept. Not yet.

Suhail's hand is still extended.

LAYLA
Sheikh Haider must approve. We
would need his metals for
construction.

She turns to Jassim. He nods.

LAYLA
Sheikh Jady too. Your dam would
stop the river's flow into his
city.

Suhail puts his hand down.

SUHAIL
I will begin my journey to Star's
Cradle tomorrow then.

Layla tilts back.

LAYLA
So soon?

SUHAIL
I wish I could stay.

His gaze lands on the falling water.

SUHAIL
But we have no time to waste.

He turns back to Layla. She holds his eyes.

LAYLA
Well then.

The Sheikha extends her hand.

LAYLA
Allow me to accompany you.

EXT. GREENLANDS - CARAVAN ROAD - DAY

Camel-led caravans move up and down a wide road of shoveled dirt between tall orange grass. Among them, a collage of Free Tribe emblems. Looms and Chisels and Ropes. Even some Branches.

INT. LAYLA'S WAGON - DAY - TRAVELING

Thaaban looks out a window. The grass outside blurs past. He sits next to Suhail and Doub on a leather couch across from Layla and Farasha. A mandarin flower chandelier dangles on vine between them. Suhail is looking at it. Its lights are flickering.

SUHAIL
How long have they lasted,
Sheikha?

LAYLA
Excuse me?

SUHAIL
Your city's lights?

Layla notices the flickering lights.

LAYLA
They were gathered by my
great-grandfather. Before the
Cursed Warden's reign.

A bump on the road. The chandelier swings. Suhail looks past it into Layla's eyes.

SUHAIL
Sheikh Mohsen.

Layla's face shifts, almost like a veil was lifted.

SUHAIL
My mother used to read me his
stories.

Layla follows the flickering lights on the swinging chandelier.

SUHAIL
Warden of the Roofless. The Orphan
Builder.

Suhail looks up at her and smiles.

SUHAIL
The cycle echoes with a new face.

The Sheikha's eyes snap to him. Her jaw tenses. Farasha holds her hand. The chandelier stills.

LAYLA
You are not to speak of my
history.

Suhail nods. Farasha lets go.

DOUB
Look!

Doub points at his window. A group of people are marching between the caravans. They are waving flags marked by three stars. Layla watches the flags pass.

LAYLA
How do you command such
conviction?

Farasha turns to her.

FARASHA
Why don't you see for yourself?
We're close to one of our
outposts.

EXT. GREENLANDS - SEER OUTPOST - DAY

They follow Farasha through tall blades of grass and into an oasis of woven tents and makeshift shacks. Kids play between women and men. A person guides a herd of woolen animals grazing. Some of the villagers are cooking. Others are gathering. One is weaving. Caravans load crates near a stall with a long line. Layla points to it.

LAYLA
Those people. I recognize some of
them.

Suhail walks towards it.

SUHAIL
Show a better path, and feet will
find it.

He looks back at her.

SUHAIL
Even your own.

The STALLKEEPER waves him over.

STALLKEEPER
Suhail!

A BOY runs to him.

BOY
Suhail!

Suhail kneels as the boy leaps for a hug.

SUHAIL
Basil! You've grown so much!

He scruffs his hair. Doub appears from behind the stall carrying a bag. A GIRL runs up to Suhail.

SUHAIL
Iqbal.

Suhail is already smiling.

SUHAIL
What did I say about your
goodnight kiss?

IQBAL
But she told me to stop.

Doub hands BASIL a toy from the bag. Suhail glances towards a woman skinning an animal. She avoids his eyes. He crouches slightly, so he's level with IQBAL.

SUHAIL
Your mother is tired in a way
words don't fix.

Iqbal frowns.

IQBAL
Did I do something wrong?

Suhail shakes his head gently.

SUHAIL
No, of course not.

Puts a hand on her shoulder.

SUHAIL
Her heart. It's hurting.

More kids crowd Doub, toys passing from hand to hand.

SUHAIL
She needs your light, even if she
forgot how to ask for it.

Suhail gives Iqbal a small, conspiratorial smile. She hugs him, eyeing the toy bag. Suhail turns to Layla standing over them. She's holding herself looser. He extends a hand to her. She takes it. Suhail leads the Sheikha to the stall. The line of people parts for them. The stallkeeper tips his head.

STALLKEEPER
My Sheikha.

He brushes his finger down a list to her name.

STALLKEEPER
There you are.

Layla looks down the list herself. The stallkeeper looks back.

STALLKEEPER
The scroll.

A long-armed Seer peeks from behind piles of supplies. Layla turns to Suhail.

LAYLA
You knew I would be joining you?

Suhail shakes his head.

SUHAIL
I only planned for it, my Sheikha.

The Seer hands the stallkeeper a scroll. The stallkeeper holds it out to the Sheikha.

SUHAIL
But I am grateful that you did.

Sheikha Layla accepts the scroll and unrolls it. She tries hard to stop herself from gasping. On top, handwritten, 'On the Orphan Builder: An Eyewitness Account.'

EXT. GREENLANDS - SEER OUTPOST - NIGHT

The sanctuary of tents is asleep, still under starlight. Farasha is examining one of them. Layla approaches behind her.

LAYLA
I've never seen this weave before.

Farasha jumps.

FARASHA
My Sheikha, you should be asleep.

Sheikha Layla brushes her finger over the fabric.

LAYLA
All this complexity, unseen by
most.

Farasha nods.

FARASHA
The Sacred Weave protects us from
rainwater. A gift to my ancestors
from the jungle.

Sheikha Layla looks up to her.

LAYLA
Do you miss it?

Farasha pauses, then gently nods.

INT. SEER OUTPOST - TENT - NIGHT

In the dark, Doub stares at his mother's shadow. Next to him, Suhail and Thaaban are asleep.

DOUB
Suhail?

Suhail rolls over, smiling. Doub taps him.

DOUB
Suhail?

Suhail's eyes open as his smile melts.

SUHAIL
Doub?

DOUB
I can't sleep.

Doub sits up.

DOUB
Our cousins are still stranded
with the Caretakers.

Suhail is quiet for a moment. Doub buries his face into his arms.

DOUB
What life is that?

Thaaban mumbles in his sleep.

DOUB
They have a right to see the world
as you have shown me.

Suhail sits up next to Doub.

SUHAIL
Go free them.

Silence settles between them.

SUHAIL
We're going to need more outposts
anyways.

EXT. SEER OUTPOST - LAYLA'S WAGON - DAY

Suhail embraces Doub. Beside them, Farasha embraces Thaaban. Then they switch. Thaaban with Doub. Farasha with Suhail. They pull back. Suhail and Thaaban stand across from Farasha and Doub. They are all smiling. Farasha and Doub walk away, leaving Suhail and Thaaban by Layla's open wagon door.

EXT. SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS - CARAVAN ROAD - DAY

The wagon winds through the highlands. Camel hooves patter over more stone than grass. Boulders jut at uneven angles, each ledge crowned with a fat bird. The birds watch the wagon approach without much concern.

INT. LAYLA'S WAGON - DAY - TRAVELING

Suhail looks out the window. A flock of them parts, flapping useless wings. He turns to Thaaban.

SUHAIL
Doub would have loved this.

EXT. SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS - SMALL OUTPOST - DUSK

Tents hang between icy rocks beneath the setting ringed planet. This outpost is smaller. There are barely a dozen people. Thaaban embraces one of the Seers. Suhail shakes a hand. Layla watches.

EXT. SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS - BOULDER PASS - DAY

The wagon weaves between a maze of boulders, higher than the horizon. Daylight streaks from an opening. They pass through it. The mountain range steals the horizon.

EXT. SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS - MOUNTAIN ROAD - CAMPSITE - LATER

Smoke rises from a small campfire. The wagon is stopped on a snow-backed cliff. Layla sits with Suhail and Thaaban shivering around it. A guard places a fur coat on Suhail from behind. He places another on Thaaban. They stop shivering.

EXT. STAR'S CRADLE - MOUNTAIN LEDGE - DAWN

A blizzard rages as the caravan climbs the mountain's side. Camels grunt through the heavy winds. The thin ledge they trot across gets wider. The camels stop. Sheikha Layla steps out of her wagon holding her blowing coat against the blizzard. Suhail and Thaaban follow.

The ringed planet is rising behind the mountain's peak, but the sky is a dark blue rather than green. Firelight emanates from within an inconspicuous cave. The Chisel marks its icy awning, difficult to see through the heavy fog. Backed by the hidden flame, a fur-coated figure emerges. Layla walks faster.

LAYLA

Haider.

SHEIKH HAIDER laughs.

HAIDER

My Sheikha!

He approaches.

HAIDER

Bless the stars, I've missed you.

They hug. Layla relaxes into his arms. Haider pulls back. He scans Suhail and Thaaban nearby. Turns to Layla.

HAIDER

Could it be?

Back to Suhail.

HAIDER

The Voice of the Stars?

INT. STAR'S CRADLE - ENTRANCE TUNNEL - DAWN - CONTINUOUS

Haider leads. Wall-mounted torches breathe firelight onto him.

HAIDER

Have you heard from Aldebaran lately?

Sheikha Layla shakes her head, distracted by drawings on the wall. They glow faint green.

HAIDER

The experts upgraded their
faucets. Deliveries should be
faster.

Suhail is also looking at the drawings. Stick figures.
People with spears. Strange beasts that look like men. They
approach emerald light. Something barks from within it.
Thaaban jumps. Suhail holds his hand.

SUHAIL

Don't worry, Baba. They're
friendly.

Haider's eyes go from Thaaban's flinch to the boy holding
his hand. Something in his face loosens.

INT. STAR'S CRADLE - MAIN CAVERN - DAWN - CONTINUOUS

They step through the light. Thaaban's eyes go wide. The
mountain is hollow. Hundreds of small stone houses cling to
a wide ledge of rock, doors almost touching, on top of each
other like stairs. Walls of stacked stone, warmed by the
firelight inside them. Children chase dogs between them.
Dogs chase children back. A woman calls one of them home.

Above, emerald crystals seam the ceiling like a second sky.
Below, the ledge ends in a glow. The city is a balcony.
Haider pats Thaaban's back.

HAIDER

Welcome to Star's Cradle.

He turns to Suhail.

HAIDER

Your name is known well here.

He nods.

HAIDER

This is true.

They walk through an open space between the buildings. A
plaza of fur coats, barking dogs, and trickling water.
People turn around them. Their voices quiet. Haider laughs.

HAIDER

Carry on, everyone! You will be
briefed tomorrow!

Suhail notices scrapes along the mountain's wall. A metallic layer shimmers within them. Layla follows the trickling water to the city's edge. She looks down.

An underground lake. Light breathes from deep within its water, casting even more stone houses in turquoise light. People chat along its rim, feet dangling in the glow. A dog leaps in from between them. Children jump in after it. Layla loses herself to the sounds of splashing and laughter and play. A MAN runs to Suhail. Haider turns to him.

HAIDER
Not now, Kawkab.

Kawkab bows to his Sheikh, then turns to Suhail.

KAWKAB
I was there that night. When—
Suhail nods.

SUHAIL
I remember you well, Kawkab.
Kawkab grins, playing with his thumbs.

KAWKAB
I've always wondered what happened
to them. That New World Squad?
Suhail looks down.

SUHAIL
Two made it home.
He shakes his head.

SUHAIL
Faisal is with the stars.
Kawkab kneels, touches the stone ground, and puts a hand to his chest. As he stands, Sheikh Haider places a hand on Kawkab's shoulder.

HAIDER
We will honor his name in stone.
Kawkab nods.

INT. STAR'S CRADLE - MEMORIAL WELL - DAWN - CONTINUOUS

Haider leads Suhail between metal walls ringed with rails at every level. Water drips into it from above. The walls are etched with names. So many they have nearly swallowed the metal. The whole space breathes faint green light.

Kawkab fits his chisel into a gap between the letters of a stranger's name. He carves Faisal's name into the space. Green light seeps from within the metal as he works, reflecting his face back into it. Haider turns to Layla.

HAIDER
We're stopping our production of
metal tablets.

Kawkab bows beside them, then leaves the chamber. Layla sees Haider through the names on the wall.

LAYLA
You wish to play the markets?

Haider shakes his head.

HAIDER
Permanence can be dangerous, my
Sheikha.

Thaaban and Suhail are examining the names nearby.

HAIDER (O.S.)
What's etched in metal becomes
truth.

LAYLA
And your metal's increased value
is just an unintended consequence,
I'm sure.

Haider looks at her. Then laughs.

HAIDER
Now then.

He turns to Suhail.

HAIDER
I'm indebted to you, Suhail. You
have singlehandedly protected
every one of our caravans from
bandits.

Suhail doesn't reply. He is staring at a name.

HAIDER

Suhail?

The name is Soha. Its green text reflects off Suhail's eyes. A woman hums through the Voice. The Melody of Warmth. Haider taps his shoulder.

HAIDER

Suhail?

He notices the name Suhail is staring at.

HAIDER

Oh.

He rests two fingers against the metal beside the name.

HAIDER

Sheikha Soha...Aldebaran's wife.

Suhail turns to Haider. Then, almost as if he were compelled, Suhail hugs him.

SUHAIL

The stars do not bind by debt.

EXT. STAR'S CRADLE - MOUNTAIN SLOPE - NIGHT

Beneath a sky full of stars, Thaaban, Suhail, Haider, and Layla soar up the mountain on a dog sled. The MUSHER plays a note on a stone flute. The dogs go faster. Suhail's hair whips against the wind. He is giggling with exhilaration. Thaaban is giggling with him. Haider's voice is barely audible over the thick wind.

HAIDER

What did I tell you? There's nothing like experiencing it for yourself!

The sled snakes around a tight corner. Layla leans to the side.

LAYLA

I'm getting nauseous.

Haider pats her back.

HAIDER

You used to love this as a child!

He laughs. A note on the stone flute. The dogs slow down.

EXT. STAR'S CRADLE - SUMMIT - NIGHT

Suhail slides out of the sled. He looks up. Ribbons of color dance high in the sky. Thaaban steps out from behind Suhail and looks up at the aurora. He places an arm around his son. A small campfire is already set for them. Haider gestures towards it.

HAIDER
Here, we welcome the Stars as
witness.

He leads them to the fire. They sit down.

HAIDER
You need my metals for a dam?

Suhail nods.

HAIDER
I trust you, Suhail.

Haider turns to Layla.

HAIDER
But why do you wish it to be done,
Sheikha?

Layla stiffens.

LAYLA
What do you imply?

The dogs are barking.

LAYLA
I too do not wish the Greenlands
to suffer.

HAIDER
And you would divert all your
resources towards it? Your people
are content.

The barking is louder. Layla's face is frosted red.

LAYLA
I told you already! I wish to
help!

Thaaban holds her hand. The musher plays his stone flute. Warm notes blanket the barking dogs. Haider is still waiting. Suhail is staring at the flute. The musher's melody stills the cold air between them. The dogs become quiet. Layla looks down.

LAYLA

I...want to be remembered.

She looks back up. Haider's hand is extended. Her mouth opens. Then, she shakes it. Haider offers Suhail the same hand. Suhail shakes it. The four sit tiny atop Al-Lawha. Haider smiles.

HAIDER

Our union is witnessed by the
Stars.

He stands and walks away. The music stops. Suhail holds his hand over the warm fire. He sees Layla. Her eyes on the snow below. He sees his father, his eyes on the stars above. An arm extends from behind Suhail. The stone flute. Suhail turns to see Haider holding it out. Haider nods. Suhail takes it.

BEGIN MONTAGE - THE DAM / THE MELODY

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY

Suhail leans out over the city. Falling water drones around him. He holds the stone flute out. Plays a note. It's off.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The radiant ball of light pulses deep within the void.

SUHAIL (V.O.)

There is a warmth inside me, Baba.

INT. STAR'S CRADLE - MINE

Pick-axe strikes stone against Suhail's dissonant notes. Miners are digging for metal.

SUHAIL (V.O.)

It...he soothes me.

EXT. SOUTHERN FALLS - DAM

Suhail holds out schematics of a dam. Thaaban and Layla nod beside him. He lowers them. The falls ahead.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
But...he's aching.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - DUSK

Suhail practices the flute as the ringed planet sets in the deep green sky.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
I don't know how to explain it,
Baba.

EXT. STAR'S CRADLE - ENTRANCE

Fur-coated people fight heavy snow. They carry crates into caravans waiting outside the Chisel's entrance. The crates are marked by three stars.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
He feels trapped.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - WEST BANK

Suhail, Layla, Thaaban, and Jassim watch workers raking a plot beside the river.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
Like he's carrying someone else's
weight.

EXT. GREENLANDS - CARAVAN ROAD

Caravans marked by the Chisel crawl through the Greenlands.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
And I allow it.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - YEARS LATER

Suhail pulls the flute away from his mouth with grown hands. A breath rages out of him. He looks out at the city and plays another note. A young man now.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
The Seers. All of you, you suffer!

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - WEST BANK - WAREHOUSE

Stone-dusted workers move about a half-built warehouse. It overlooks the river's rope bridges into the city.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
And you look to me for clarity.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY

Suhail holds a piece of metal wrapped in powervine. A magnet. Layla and Thaaban are looking down at it. The waterfall roars behind them. Suhail connects it to a wilted mandarin flower.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
When really, I was looking away.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - NIGHT

Suhail leans on the wall, lit by blue Warden's Bloom. He turns. His eyes wet.

SUHAIL
I was selfish, Baba.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT

Suhail's face is hardened. His lips callused around the flute. He is playing better. Not quite a melody. But notes that are cohering. The city's mandarin lights are flickering below.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
I held onto him.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - WEST BANK - WAREHOUSE

The warehouse is fully built. Crates flow in and out. Caravans marked by both the Loom and Chisel stop around it.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
Just so that I could keep moving.

EXT. SOUTHERN FALLS - DAM

Water surges out of a half-built dam. It spills out of Al-Lawha in waves.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
But now...

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - NIGHT

Tears are streaming down Thaaban's face. He is holding Suhail's hand, leaning on the wall beside him.

SUHAIL
I'm alone.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT

Suhail's eyes shut on his stone flute. He reaches for more beautiful notes. The flute glints beneath the starlight.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The ball of light in the void dims.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY

Layla and Thaaban watch Suhail. He spins a piece of metal like a top next to the wilted mandarin flower. It curls, then lights back up, reflecting off Layla's wide eyes.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
The Voice of the Stars is a lie.

EXT. SOUTHERN FALLS - STONE STEPS

Tens of people help carry a large magnet up misty stone steps.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
It was always him.

EXT. SOUTHERN FALLS - DAM

Suhail and Thaaban are small beneath a large dam. It imposes on the horizon.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
He guided the way.

EXT. GREENLANDS - OUTPOST NETWORK - TIME-LAPSE

More outposts dot the Greenlands. More streams of water connect them. Like the wisps of light in the void. The orange grass turns green.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
My Echo.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - NIGHT

Suhail leaps onto his father.

SUHAIL
I miss him so much, Baba.

He buries his face into Thaaban's open arms.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT

Suhail lowers his flute. In front of him, Water's Loom is renewed with life. Bright mandarin light weaves through flowered waterwheels and flowered elevators, fully integrated into the self-powered city. He looks to his right. Beyond the river, in the far distance, the Dam is fully built. It looms.

END MONTAGE

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - INTERMISSION

As a five minute countdown approaches zero, the camera holds on a living, breathing painting:

Suhail plays over Water's Loom.

Small.

His eyes beyond the Dam.

He plays.

A note.

FLASH: A fur coat.

Another note.

FLASH: Thaaban's arms around Suhail.

Note by note, Suhail recovers the Melody of Warmth. A living, breathing painting.

END OF INTERMISSION

ALTAIR (V.O.)

Sada!

Suhail lifts the flute from his lips. He wipes his eyes and turns back inside the guest chamber.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Suhail lies down on a bed with two pillows. He stares at the empty space beside him. At the pillow where no one lies. And drifts to sleep alone.

EXT. CLIMBER'S VALLEY - SOUTHERN ELEVATOR - DAY

Suhail, Thaaban, Layla, and Jassim descend in the flowered elevator. They have it to themselves. Thaaban feels the Serpent's wall brush against his finger as they fall. He traces it around purple flowers curling between its stone. Layla is looking down. The valley is so far below, a village of wood, leaf, and leather nested at the lowest point of Al-Lawha.

Suhail stares at a paleochannel running through the valley. A row of empty restaurants beside it.

SUHAIL

Sheikh Jady still holds anger in him.

Thaaban holds Suhail's shoulder. They look out to the far left. Where the jungle shimmers, now with a thick fog. The elevator is almost at the bottom. Layla taps her fingers on its rail.

LAYLA

He would listen to me. I'm sure of it.

A Warden's Bloom hums with light as the elevator lands. Jassim slides the rail open for them.

EXT. CLIMBER'S VALLEY - MAIN SQUARE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Ahead, hundreds of VALLEY SNAILS crawl. They crawl between huts. They crawl between feet. They crawl between flags waving the Rope of Climber's Valley. And between flags marked with three stars. Sheikha Layla covers her nose. Jassim turns to her.

JASSIM

Watch your step, Sheikha.

She looks at the snails crawling up the Serpent's north face on the other side of the valley. They leave slimy trails behind them. Her lips curl down. She catches Thaaban smiling in her direction.

LAYLA

What? This part of the migration was never the prettiest.

Stepping around the snails, Suhail's gaze hangs on a shack marked with a single star. The Scholar's Mark. Thaaban pulls him ahead towards the valley's edge.

EXT. CLIMBER'S VALLEY - OUTER EDGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A row of stakes is pitched onto the stone floor. Climbing ropes are slung off into the sea of clouds beyond it. Sheikha Layla peeks over the edge.

Below, the valley descends in tiers. Stone ledges step down out of Al-Lawha, each one a platform large enough to hold a settlement. Ropes hang between them. Climbers move up and down. Some are settled on the ledges. Some are passing between them. The whole valley is in motion.

The first tier below them is barren stone. The next has moss along its edges. The one below that is hung with ferns. The one below that has small trees clinging to its outer rim. Each tier is greener than the one above it.

Far below, the clouds are sparser. Snails climb up from beneath them, slow against the stone. Climbers harvest the snails as they ascend. The lowest tier visible is a shelf of grass, a small village built into it, its edges bright with flowers. A MAN taps Suhail's shoulder. Pockets down his vine-fiber sleeves, a pen at his collar.

MAN

You're him, aren't you?

Jassim's hand jolts to his dagger. Suhail doesn't look away from the valley's edge.

SUHAIL
140,000 hitches down, is that
correct?

The man fiddles with a star pinned to his chest.

MAN
The rumors are true, then. How do
you do it?

Suhail shrugs.

SUHAIL
You're the Scholar, Shahid. You
tell me.

A short laugh escapes SHAHID. Sheikha Layla turns to Suhail.

LAYLA
What are you talking about?

SUHAIL
This young man believes the water
that surrounds Al-Lawha has been
falling.

Shahid steps closer.

SHAHID
Not just falling, sir. The
declining water level is
accelerating.

Jassim glances at Shahid. He huffs beneath his breath.

LAYLA
You mean, another world below?

Layla's eyes widen.

LAYLA
Could it be?

Shahid looks between Layla and Suhail. Suhail is raising a
brow at him.

SHAHID
Well.

Shahid looks at his fingers.

SHAHID

My superiors don't believe me. But you do, right? You're the Messiah. You must know the truth.

SUHAIL

I...only know that you believe it.

Shahid's head falls.

SUHAIL

Your plan to climb down. It's too dangerous.

Shahid looks towards the edge.

SHAHID

But the water won't stay this low. Not for many cycles.

He turns to leave. Suhail grabs him.

SUHAIL

Don't do it.

Shahid pulls away from Suhail's grip.

SHAHID

To see the truth and not act?

Before Suhail can respond, he walks off. One of the ropes by their feet is tight. A man is climbing it. He presses himself over the edge. SHEIKH JADY stands.

JADY

To what do I owe this displeasure?

Layla is startled.

LAYLA

Sheikh Jady! Look at you. You've grown!

Jady looks at Suhail.

JADY

Why is that boy here? He's done enough damage.

Behind them, flags with three stars wave over scattered huts. Suhail smiles.

SUHAIL
My Sheikh. Your hatred is
misguided.

Jady's nostrils flare.

JADY
Your dam stole our lives! Our
river runs dry! We are forced to
climb lower each day!

His hands are tight fists. People walk across a dried
depression behind them. The memory of a river. Layla takes
Jady's hand. She holds it gently.

LAYLA
But it was you who approved it,
Sheikh.

Jady is red.

JADY
I was a child!

He whips his hand away.

JADY
You betray your Warden while
Aldebaran sweats in our name!

He glances at Suhail. Suhail is looking out across the
horizon.

JADY
For what? A Messiah?

Suhail turns away from the clouds and takes a step towards
Jady.

SUHAIL
You're right. The dam has hurt
your people in a way I did not
anticipate. I admit, I didn't
foresee the wildlife migrating
lower.

Jady looks away.

SUHAIL
I'm sorry, but know that your
sacrifice is saving hundreds of
lives, even as we speak.

Jady doesn't turn.

JADY
Tell me. Why are you here?

Sheikha Layla takes his hand again. She holds onto his eyes.
Slowly.

LAYLA
We wish to build a bridge.

Jady throws his hand back. His eyes burn.

JADY
How dare you?

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - NIGHT

Suhail holds a hand of cards on the rug. Thaaban throws a card from his hand onto a pile between them.

SUHAIL
I can't ignore them.

Suhail throws a card from his hand.

SUHAIL
We have to build that bridge.

Thaaban shakes his head.

SUHAIL
But they're suffering.

A brow raises from behind Thaaban's cards.

SUHAIL
The Voice will keep getting
louder.

Thaaban holds Suhail's gaze.

SUHAIL
What? Really? So, I should just
allow them to hurt?

Thaaban exaggerates a breath. He gestures for Suhail to do the same. Suhail clicks his tongue.

SUHAIL
Noura is hurting! People are
suffocating! It's your turn!

Thaaban throws his cards and stands up. Suhail looks at the cards. Then at his father. He jumps up and embraces him.

SUHAIL
I'm sorry, Baba. I just can't
stand it anymore.

Suhail pulls back.

SUHAIL
I need your voice back.

As Thaaban reaches for Suhail, his arms fall limp. They both collapse onto the rug. Suhail gasps for air. Thaaban convulses, wheezing. They hold each other's hands as they fight for breath together. Their eyes meet.

SUHAIL
The blight...is spreading.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - NEW WORLD BASE - DAY

A metallic warehouse blocks the Serpent's edge. It is decorated in Warden's Bloom. And raised fists. Followers. They chant:

FOLLOWERS
Down with the New World! Down with
the Warden!

Flowered conveyor belts eject supplies out of the warehouse. Couriers move them into caravans marked by the Branch. New World soldiers stand guard nearby. NAYLA, FAY, and RASHID stand among them, hands on their vine whips. Nayla is staring at people scrubbing paint off the metal. Through the half-wiped text, she makes out two lines. 'Not your shore.' 'Akrab lies.'

RASHID
Wasn't he your father?

Rashid is looking at her.

RASHID
I'm sorry for your loss.

Nayla smiles.

NAYLA
I barely remember him.

EXT. NEW WORLD - NORTHERN EDGE - FLASHBACK

Nayla is a child trying to make her way to the front of a packed crowd.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - NEW WORLD BASE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A FOLLOWER approaches her.

FOLLOWER

It's you.

Nayla's eyes meet his. He spits at her and runs away.
Nayla's fist clenches. She turns to Fay.

NAYLA

Stand patrol by that hill. Any
sign of aggression, and you blow
the whistle.

Fay's hand clasps the whistle hanging off her neck. She
salutes. Nayla's eyes fall back on the words. 'Akrab lies.'

EXT. NEW WORLD - NORTHERN EDGE - FLASHBACK

Akrab stands, back turned, hands tied, before a booing
crowd. He faces a sea of clouds.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - NEW WORLD BASE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Nayla shakes her head.

NAYLA

Rashid.

Rashid nods.

NAYLA

Check the perimeter and report
back.

Rashid's hands are on his waist.

RASHID

The base is clear, I already—

NAYLA

Again.

He salutes and walks away. Nayla watches the followers.
Their chant echoes.

FOLLOWERS

Down with the New World! Down with
the Warden!

EXT. NEW WORLD - NORTHERN EDGE - FLASHBACK

Akrab steps off the edge. Nayla covers her eyes.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - NEW WORLD BASE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Rashid walks around the warehouse. He passes a flowerbomb blinking by his feet. Three stars etched onto it. A loud whistle. Fay takes a breath and blows again. Soaked rags in bottles fly overhead into the New World conveyors. Couriers scream. The conveyors are engulfed in fire. Nayla turns to a soldier next to her.

NAYLA

Sand! Now!

He bolts to help more soldiers around the conveyors. They shovel sand into the fire.

INT./EXT. NEW WORLD BASE - SUPPLY RACKS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Rashid searches between racks of supplies. Followers are running away from the warehouse. One of them is the ADVOCATE. He is taller now. His thumb hangs over a button.

ADVOCATE

Voice of the Stars, hear our call!

The Advocate grits his teeth, and presses.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - NEW WORLD BASE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The base explodes, swallowing the conveyors and bursting metal. Fay launches back, pierced by the shrapnel. Nayla presses herself up, bloodied and burnt. She turns towards the raging fire, with even greater rage in her eyes.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - DAY

Suhail jolts awake. Reaches his arm out.

SUHAIL

It wasn't me!

Thaaban is panting next to him. He grasps Suhail's arm. It falls back down. Suhail turns to him.

SUHAIL

It must be built, Baba.

Thaaban lets go of Suhail's arm. Slowly, he nods. They breathe together. The world comes into focus.

SUHAIL
I almost forgot!

Suhail jumps up and turns to the door. It knocks. Thaaban grins like an excited child as Suhail runs for it. He opens it. Farasha and Doub stand with huge smiles on their faces. Doub is taller than Farasha now. He leaps onto Suhail. Suhail holds him tighter. Thaaban makes room for Farasha beside them. Doub pulls back.

DOUB
Come on, we're missing the festival.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - FESTIVAL STREETS - DAY

The city is crowded with color. Farasha's eyes move from person to person as they walk through the streets. All kinds of woven attire. Robes, shawls, headwraps. Each one different from the next. They turn into the Waterways, a maze of tiered stone paths and bridges over flowing water. Merchant stalls are set up throughout them. Each with a long line. Farasha stops a WOMAN.

FARASHA
Your weave is so pretty.

The woman blushes.

WOMAN
Thank you.

Her eyes fall to Farasha's sleeve. She steps closer. Her finger traces a line around the stitching. It doesn't end.

WOMAN
Where did you learn this?

Doub grins beside his mother.

DOUB
The jungle.

The woman looks at him. At the grass woven through his cloth. At the others. Her face opens.

WOMAN
Suhail?

Suhail smiles and nods.

WOMAN

Oh, please tell me, how's my son doing?

Doub's and Thaaban's chins rise as they watch Suhail.

SUHAIL

He leads his caravan with integrity. You should be proud of him.

The woman exhales. Suhail exhales with her.

SUHAIL

Enjoy the festival.

She lowers her head, nods, and continues walking. Doub turns to Suhail.

DOUB

I've been craving that soup ever since we left.

Suhail smirks.

SUHAIL

Where did you think we were headed?

He yanks Doub's hand forward. Doub puts an arm around Suhail as they walk through the crowd together.

DOUB

I really missed you, Suhail.

They stop at a rail and look out. Waterwheels spin across falling streams. Below them, the town square is surrounded by water. They watch young women setting up their weaving stations on it. One of them looks up from her loom. Doub catches her grey eyes.

SUHAIL

I never thanked you.

Suhail turns to Doub.

SUHAIL

For saving the boys.

The rope bridges running in and out of the square are tight with people.

SUHAIL
I wouldn't have made it this far
without you.

Suhail pulls back from the rails.

SUHAIL
And taming the Anqa.

He pats Doub's back.

SUHAIL
That was so cool!

Doub beams.

DOUB
You saw that?

SUHAIL
Of course I did. Just like I see
you now.

Doub's eyes shift away from the women. Suhail winks. Farasha catches up with Thaaban behind them.

FARASHA
I'm so excited! Let's go!

Doub turns to her. His eyes like an abandoned camel's.

DOUB
But soup.

FARASHA
It's going to start soon.

There's genuine worry in Farasha's face. Doub presses his hands together.

DOUB
Please! There's barely a line.
We'll be quick.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - FOOD MARKET - DAY

Thaaban, Suhail, and Doub grab their soups. Behind them, Farasha is tapping her feet. Doub turns to her, steaming soup in his hands.

DOUB
You sure you don't want one?

Thaaban extends his soup to Farasha. Farasha shakes her head.

FARASHA
I'm good, let's go!

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - TOWN SQUARE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Sheikha Layla walks between the young women behind their looms.

LAYLA
Standing before you are our city's
best weavers.

The bridges that lead into the town square are blocked off.
A dense crowd watches around it.

LAYLA
We say this festival preserves our
patterns.

Sheikha Layla meets an eye in the crowd.

LAYLA
What is really preserved is our
stories.

Farasha is pushing her way to the front. She arrives at a rail with a perfect view, between a bunch of young men ogling.

LAYLA
Stories of crossings and returns.
Of hands that learned from other
hands.

Thaaban, Doub, and Suhail are making their way to Farasha.

LAYLA
No two weaves are the same,
because no two lives are.

Sheikha Layla picks up a crystal dial connected to powervine.

LAYLA
And every generation tied them
differently.

She holds it up. Looks at Farasha at the front.

LAYLA

Today we honor those who remember.

She turns the crystal. It clicks. Fireworks ignite behind her. The young women begin weaving. Suhail arrives next to Farasha. His eyes fall on one of the hands braiding together different colored threads.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Something shifts. A man's shape moves where the light was. Fard.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - TOWN SQUARE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail shakes his head. Farasha's eyes are wide seeing the patterns come alive. Thaaban is yawning. Doub is ogling alongside the other young men next to him. Suhail pulls back. He squints. A hand over his head as if shading his eyes from something bright.

IN THE VOICE

The light is getting brighter. And brighter.
It explodes into pure light.

BACK IN THE SQUARE

Suhail is blinded. He falls on the ground. The crowd parts around him. Doub drops down.

DOUB

Suhail!

Thaaban is over him. He shakes Suhail, trying to wake him up.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The radiant ball is gone. Where its light was, the wisps are still being absorbed by something much larger. A black hole.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - TOWN SQUARE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail opens his eyes. He moves his head. Slowly. A fuzzy Farasha over him.

FARASHA
Suhail!

SUHAIL
...Mama?

Farasha and Thaaban help him up.

FARASHA
No, Suhail, it's me.

Suhail finds himself smiling. The crowd shuffles away.
Sheikha Layla is running towards them.

LAYLA
What was that?

Suhail sits up.

SUHAIL
What was what?

Farasha turns to Thaaban. Thaaban keeps a hand under his son's elbow.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - NIGHT

Falling water drapes the balcony. It gleams mandarin orange from the city's lights below. Sheikha Layla sits with Jassim. Their reflections tangle over the flowing water. Across from them, Suhail holds Thaaban's arm under the table. Through the Voice: Noura's rolling rhythm on the metallic dome.

LAYLA
Serpent's Shore?

Sheikha Layla's eyes are searching for something.

LAYLA
That's Kathib's place. Why would he turn against his own ally?

Suhail lets go of Thaaban.

SUHAIL
Kathib's interests stopped aligning with those of his people a long time ago.

The drumming continues through the Voice. Tender. Delicate. Aching. His eyes are cloudy. He looks down. Thaaban holds him.

LAYLA
Suhail. What's wrong?

Suhail looks up at Layla.

SUHAIL
I'm so sorry for your loss,
Sheikha.

LAYLA
What loss?

Suhail turns to Jassim.

SUHAIL
What did he do?

JASSIM
What?

SUHAIL
His shadow. I know he's there.

A guard barges through the doors.

GUARD
Sheikha.

He salutes and hands her a scroll. Runs out. Layla looks at Suhail, then at the scroll in her hand. She unrolls it. Her grip crushes its edge. Suhail paces around the balcony, hands behind his back.

VISION - NOURA'S HANDS

Noura's fingers blur over the metallic dome. Faster. Notes beautiful, but angry.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - NIGHT -
CONTINUOUS

Jassim stands.

JASSIM
What's wrong, my Sheikha?

Suhail looks at him.

SUHAIL
The whole city?

JASSIM
I don't know what you're—

Layla slams the table.

LAYLA
Drop the act.

JASSIM
Sheikha...I...

Layla's eyes pierce his.

LAYLA
You told them about the bridge?

Jassim's face betrays his dread.

LAYLA
Guards!

Two guards seize Jassim. He clicks his tongue.

JASSIM
I've only ever protected you!

Layla presses her face close to his.

LAYLA
Was the New World responsible?

JASSIM
Responsible for what?

She looks at the scroll. She tries to flatten the edge she crushed.

LAYLA
The Buried City! Were you responsible?

A dagger presses into Jassim's neck. Suhail flings his hand to cover his own neck. Jassim winces.

JASSIM
May the peaks of the Cradle
witness my voice. I don't know
what you're talking about!

He turns to Suhail.

JASSIM
Tell them.

Suhail's eyes are somewhere else.

SUHAIL
He's not just NWI, is he?

JASSIM
What?

Jassim's skin folds around the guard's grip. Suhail shakes his head.

SUHAIL
Fard. You lied to me.

Jassim pushes against the guards.

JASSIM
No, Suhail! I never lied.

His hand clenches into a fist.

JASSIM
Get that away from me!

He smacks the dagger away from his neck.

JASSIM
They named you!

A guard runs for it.

JASSIM
The Voice of the Stars!

The other pulls him closer.

JASSIM
In Serpent's Shore!

Suhail looks away. A complex polyphony of rhythm and melody builds.

JASSIM
As they bombed my people! That's
who they called for!

Suhail runs to Jassim.

SUHAIL
IT WASN'T ME!

His hand is around Jassim's neck as Noura's drums collide through the Voice. Layla's mouth is open. Suhail snaps his hands away and steps back. Thaaban holds onto him.

HAIDER
What is going on here?

Sheikh Haider is at the door.

LAYLA
My Sheikh!

Layla turns.

LAYLA
Why are you here?

Haider looks between Thaaban holding a trembling Suhail and the two guards holding Jassim.

HAIDER
It seems I should've gotten here
sooner.

He walks to Layla and takes her hand.

HAIDER
I just heard the news.

His face shifts.

HAIDER
We should have been there for
them. Aldebaran was a good man.

He nods.

HAIDER
This is true.

Layla embraces him, but Haider pulls away too soon. He turns to Suhail.

HAIDER
How did it happen?

Suhail's eyes are distant. His entire body shivers.

SUHAIL
I-I don't know.

He takes his father's hand. Noura screams through the Voice.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - NIGHT - LATER

Jassim sits with them at the table. Haider shakes his head.

HAIDER
I refused Jady's call. The Sheikhs
are likely gathered there as we
speak.

He stares at the water roaring behind Layla. She stands and
turns towards it. Her eyes bend on its surface.

LAYLA
So, that child planned to conspire
against me?

Haider sees Layla through her shifting reflection.

HAIDER
Why didn't you come to me first?

Layla sits back down.

HAIDER
A bridge?

She meets his eyes. Steady.

LAYLA
His refusal would have ended it.
As it did.

Suhail turns to Haider.

SUHAIL
My Sheikh. We didn't have time.

HAIDER
Didn't have time for what?

SUHAIL
The blight. It's spreading across
the Northern Lands.

Suhail looks at Thaaban.

SUHAIL
It steals more than just
flowerlight. We didn't know what
it was at first.

Suhail turns to Layla.

SUHAIL
The suffocation.

Haider catches Layla's eyes. She's frightened. Suhail looks
down at the table's studded stone.

SUHAIL

A lone traveler. A merchant
caravan. All their breaths,
stolen. No one noticed. Until...

Layla's thumb presses on her palm.

LAYLA

Is that what happened to them? The
Buried Ci—

She turns away. Haider grabs her shoulder.

HAIDER

Sheikha, we must not jump to
conclusions.

He raises a brow at Jassim.

HAIDER

The World Reserve is unclaimed
now. This is advantageous to the
New World, is it not?

Jassim's chair tilts back.

JASSIM

What? No!

Haider's eyes remain on him.

JASSIM

The New World would never allow
it! Kill an entire city? We are
not monsters! By merit, we
advance!

Haider stands up.

HAIDER

Your merit placed an NWI agent in
every tribe. Listening. Lying.

He looms over Jassim.

HAIDER

That sounds monstrous to me.

Haider turns.

HAIDER

As for you, Messiah, why go north?
Now the Northern Tribes and New
World both fear us!

Suhail stands up and steps even closer, almost to Haider's height.

SUHAIL
What would you do, Sheikh, if
innocent people called your name?

Suhail's eyes see past him.

SUHAIL
When their plea for help is so
loud, it's all you see.

Haider grunts.

HAIDER
You see so much, Messiah, it
blinds you! You go north, answer
their call, and then what?

Suhail says nothing. His head falls.

HAIDER
Your movements have consequences!
You don't even know what this
blight is, let alone how to stop
it!

The entire table is holding their breath. Suhail
straightens.

SUHAIL
You're right.

He looks up at Haider.

SUHAIL
I...made a mistake. But I will
never turn my back on people who
need me.

The water roars over his words.

SUHAIL
Our world is losing its breath.
The Reserve's flow is halted.
People will suffer.

He looks at Thaaban. Thaaban nods.

SUHAIL
I may know just the scholar who
would save us.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - DAY

Suhail marks tallies on a ledger. Thaaban sips tea on the rug beside him.

SUHAIL
You two can't protect her forever.
Noura should decide for herself.

Suhail lifts his pen. Thaaban puts his cup down. He smiles. Suhail stares at the parchment in his hands.

SUHAIL
The ledger is ready.

Thaaban nods and extends his arm. Suhail grabs it. Thaaban's eyes go somewhere else.

VISION - OUTPOST NETWORK

From above, outposts scattered across Al-Lawha pulse out of sync. Seers look up from their stalls, one face after another.

WITH SUHAIL

Suhail reads from his ledger.

VISION - OUTPOST NETWORK

The outposts pulse against each other. Then they settle.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail lets go of Thaaban.

SUHAIL
Thanks, Baba.

He places the ledger on a large pile of them, beside a stack of metal tablets. His eyes hang on the top tablet. Faint green light seeps from words etched onto it. On the Solace of Solidarity. Suhail leans on Thaaban's shoulder. His face twitches.

SUHAIL
The Northern Lands are only
getting worse.

His eyes are elsewhere.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The black hole where the city's light once shone.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
I don't blame them. I just...

An unfamiliar melody aches from behind its darkness. A
Melody of Longing.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail turns to his father.

SUHAIL
Imagine what could be done if I
managed it.

Thaaban turns to his son. His heart beats loudly.

SUHAIL
Infinite supplies...

Suhail's eyes see past him.

Suhail's face crunches.

INT. NEW WORLD - BARRACKS - TRAINING MATS - VISION

Nayla turns to Noura.

NAYLA
His followers are crazy!

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail jolts back from Thaaban.

SUHAIL
I would've never allowed it!

Thaaban grunts. He raises a brow at Suhail.

SUHAIL
Sorry, Baba, I don't know what
came over me.

Thaaban takes his hand.

SUHAIL
It's Nayla again.

His gaze passes beyond Thaaban. Nayla's words echo through the Voice.

NAYLA (V.O.)
I hate him!

Suhail stomps his feet.

SUHAIL
They hated your father!

Thaaban stands. He grips Suhail. Hard. Suhail breathes. He looks at the pile of ledgers, then at the door.

SUHAIL
I'll have Adel remind her.

The side of his lips curls upwards.

SUHAIL
I know where her father's pin is.

Thaaban shakes his head.

SUHAIL
What? She's like a thorn!

Thaaban pulls on his arm.

SUHAIL
I'm being blinded by her!

Suhail yanks his arm away.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

NOURA (V.O.)
Down!

Noura's command rips through the void. Wisps of light merge into one around her.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Suhail crashes onto the ground. Thaaban crouches down to him. He tilts his head.

SUHAIL
Noura. What have you done?

Suhail looks at his trembling hands. Thaaban's face sinks with the weight of worry.

INT. WATER'S LOOM - JAIL - DAY

Suhail steps down dark stairs. Mandarin flowerlight flickers on vines overhead. He approaches a jail cell. Through its bars, a furnished room. Almost cozy. Jassim gets up from the bed and approaches the bars.

JASSIM
Looks like our Messiah plays
favorites.

Suhail grits his teeth and takes a breath.

SUHAIL
You promised you would tell them
the truth about me.

JASSIM
I did.

SUHAIL
A conqueror?

JASSIM
That was Menkar's play, not mine.

Suhail shakes his head.

SUHAIL
The bridge?

JASSIM
It would've been misread as an act
of war!

Suhail steps back. His eyes lift towards the flickering lights.

JASSIM
It wasn't a betrayal. I knew you
would see me do it.

Suhail looks back at Jassim.

SUHAIL
And Fard?

JASSIM
I already told you, he's just our
eyes on the Buried City.

Suhail clicks his tongue.

SUHAIL
That horrible night, I saw only
him. Why?

Jassim's eyes shift.

SUHAIL
I know you, Jassim. Your love for
your people is true.

Suhail grabs the bars, his face close to Jassim's.

SUHAIL
Now help me save them.

A moment. Then all at once:

JASSIM
Fard is an Imposer.

Suhail's hand slips off the bars.

JASSIM
Like your sister.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - DUSK

Suhail leans out. He looks out across the mandarin city.
Flowing water brushes the setting ringed planet through its
woven waterways. His stone flute is in his hand. He hears
two MEN arguing far below. He sees them, tiny within a busy
street.

INTERCUT - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY / BUSY STREET

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - BUSY STREET - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

Their voices ring unnaturally close through the Voice. One
of them tries to walk away. The other pulls him back.

MAN 1
Brother, don't!

MAN 2
I must answer the Warden's call.
They're taking hands, not just
names.

MAN 1
For what? So you can live with the
dead?

MAN 2
So it stops being dead! We can't
abandon them!

MAN 1
And our mother? Our father?

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - DUSK -
CONTINUOUS

Suhail presses the flute between his lips. He begins to play
calm notes.

MAN 2 (V.O.)
I need my life to mean something.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - BUSY STREET - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

As his melody continues, the two men's voices fall softer,
until they embrace within the indifferent crowd.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - DUSK -
CONTINUOUS

Suhail transitions to the Melody of Warmth. Thaaban
approaches behind him. He watches his son playing the flute.
The wisps of light are calmer around Suhail and Thaaban. A
misplayed note. The ringed planet sets. Suhail's hands are
trembling. The flute drops from his lips.

Thaaban picks it up for him. He hands it over. Suhail puts
his hand out.

SUHAIL
That's enough for the day.

Thaaban insists. He gestures it forward. Nods.

SUHAIL
No, I shouldn't. I can feel how it
affects people.

Thaaban shakes his head.

SUHAIL
What if it's the same as Noura? As
Fard?

Thaaban shakes his head again. He presses the flute to his heart, then extends it to Suhail one more time. Suhail stares at the flute in his father's hand. He submits. He plays the Melody of Warmth. The city calms underneath its blanket. Another melody echoes back from the void. From behind the darkness. It braids with Suhail's notes in unexpected ways.

Suhail's eyes close. He improvises. Riffs off the aching melody. The song grows fuller, renewed by the answering notes. It's beautiful. Thaaban puts an arm around him. Its weight settles over Suhail's shoulders.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - STREETS - NIGHT

People throughout the crowded city still. Slowly. One by one. They turn and look up towards the music.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - NIGHT -
CONTINUOUS

Suhail opens his eyes as the melody reaches its final notes. The city is quiet.

INT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT - DAY

Thaaban pours tea for Suhail and Layla. They sit among others on the carpet. Countless patches of patterns, holding as one cloth. Suhail turns to Layla as servers walk between them.

SUHAIL
Her rage blinds her.

Layla looks at him with worried eyes. Suhail clenches his fists.

SUHAIL
She thinks she's saving the Shore!

LAYLA
Focus, Suhail.

Layla sips from her tea. Suhail unclenches.

LAYLA
How are the outposts? Any delays?

His eyes fall to the patterns.

SUHAIL
She plans to kill me.

Thaaban places a hand on Suhail's. They lift just as quickly. Suhail snaps towards the door.

SUHAIL
He's here!

Layla stands and fixes her dress. The door is closed. Then it opens. Sheikh Jady walks in. Murmurs spread as two servers run and offer him tea. Suhail picks up his flute.

INTERCUT - THE COURT PERFORMANCE / THE BALCONY CONVERSATION

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - DAY

Jady sits with Suhail, Layla, and Thaaban behind the waterfall.

INT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT - DAY

Suhail stitches notes with his flute through the crowd, weaving together a patchwork of people.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - DAY

Jady turns between the three of them.

JADY
The Warden is buried in grief
while my people are suffering.

His eyes hang on Suhail's. Suhail holds them.

JADY
Still.

Jady turns to Layla.

JADY
I can't abandon him.

LAYLA
Why are you here, Sheikh?

Layla takes his hand.

JADY
I...

Jady pulls his hand back.

JADY
I don't know.

Suhail looks off towards the North. The dam blocks the horizon.

SUHAIL
Tell me about him.

BEGIN MONTAGE - JADY'S ACCOUNT / THE BRIDGE

JADY (V.O.)
Altair looked at a crowd and
didn't see a crowd.

EXT. CLIMBER'S VALLEY - DAY

Suhail and Thaaban follow Jady. Suhail points above, between the valley's north and south faces.

JADY (V.O.)
He saw mothers. Sons. Callused
hands.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE

Suhail watches metal and stone being sorted into piles at the brink.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - DAY

JADY
He learned names like they
mattered.

Layla holds Jady's hand a second time. Jady looks up.

JADY (V.O.)
And when he played...it wasn't to
make people follow him.

There is an ache behind Suhail's eyes.

JADY (V.O.)
He made people remember they were
still alive.

INT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT - DAY

The crowd presses around Suhail. Jady slows his approach as Suhail reaches for notes tinged with longing.

JADY (V.O.)
The way he smiled.

INT. CLIMBER'S VALLEY - JADY'S HUT

A roll of parchment is spread beneath purple flowerlight. A map of the north. Thaaban and Jady are looking down at it. Suhail marks two stars. One at Serpent's Shore and one at Union's Point.

JADY (V.O.)
It was like he was trying to keep
the world from cracking.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT BALCONY - DAY

Layla finds herself nodding. Jady grunts.

JADY
But the world cracked anyways.

He stands up.

JADY
I can't abandon him or my people.

Suhail stands beside him.

SUHAIL
With your aid, my Sheikh.

He places a hand on Jady's shoulder.

SUHAIL
We won't.

Layla stands and hugs him. She pulls back.

LAYLA
I'm so sorry about the dam.

Jady pulls her in tighter. And starts crying on her shoulder.

LAYLA
Hush now, my child. You're OK...

Layla strokes his hair. Suhail watches.

END MONTAGE

INT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT - DAY

The Melody of Warmth hits its final notes. Suhail puts the flute down. The palace court applauds. Jady among them.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE - BRIDGE SITE - DUSK

Suhail holds up schematics of a bridge. He lowers them. The bridge's skeleton spans the canyon's gap before him, wide enough for multiple caravans. Workers move along its unfinished framework, threading metallic rope. Thaaban puts a hand on Suhail's shoulder. They breathe together. The skeletal span stitches the horizon. Its shadow buries the canyon below. Nearby, flowers coiled around an elevator's platform glow.

SUHAIL

She's here.

Suhail turns to it. Thaaban's smile fades. The rails open. A crowd surges out. The last of them steps off. Nayla. Her hand falls away from the whip at her side.

NAYLA

Wow.

She looks east, where the dam rises against Al-Lawha's edge. Beyond it, only clouds. Above it, the tiered waterways of Water's Loom. The green of dusk coats the city's mandarin lights. Her gaze hangs on the dam itself. Water glows from where flowered turbines spin. Channels run from its edge back into the Greenlands, threading the green plains in rivers.

Nayla finds herself smiling. She takes a step forward. A hand grabs her shoulder. She snaps around.

NAYLA

Hey!

Her hand is on her vine whip. Suhail is in front of her.

NAYLA

What do you want?

Suhail is lost in her eyes.

NAYLA

What?

Thaaban approaches. She looks between them.

NAYLA

Do I know you?

Suhail's eyes begin to well.

NAYLA

Hey?

Nayla steps closer.

NAYLA

Sir. Are you OK?

Thaaban holds Suhail's shoulder. Suhail's breath shudders.

SUHAIL

Forgive me.

Suhail falls to his knees, his voice cracking. He grabs her hand.

SUHAIL

Please!

Nayla pulls her hand away. She steps back.

SUHAIL

Nayla!

Her face twists. She steps back farther. Puts a hand out between them.

NAYLA

You're him?

She grabs her whip. Readies it, cracking the air. In front of her, the Voice of the Stars is on his knees. Thaaban sits down beside him. He hums the Melody of Warmth into Suhail's ears, his hand rubbing Suhail's back. Nayla's eyes are wide. Slowly, she returns her whip to its holster.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Nayla walks between Suhail and Thaaban. The river roars beside them. Stars scatter on its surface. Water's Loom twinkles across the bank.

NAYLA
So, what? You know everything
about my father now? The stars
must've been talking a long time.

She meets Suhail's eyes.

NAYLA
You weren't even born!

Rows of rope bridges stretch across the river ahead, broader
now. Suhail stops.

SUHAIL
You're right.

He turns to Nayla.

SUHAIL
I don't and I wasn't.

Nayla crosses her arms.

SUHAIL
But you can't deny the crimes he's
committed.

Nayla growls. Thaaban grabs her shoulder. She slips away.

SUHAIL
Even today, his name hangs heavy
over angered breaths.

Suhail turns to face the river.

SUHAIL
As mine does with yours.

Nayla grits her teeth.

NAYLA
He wasn't a monster!

Her hands fling to the red petal on her shoulder. Suhail is
still facing the river.

SUHAIL
I know.

He looks at her.

SUHAIL
He was only human.

Nayla turns. The city's mandarin lights stop her breath.

SUHAIL

I'm so sorry for your loss, Nayla.

Its waterwheels spin across woven waterways, twinkling brighter than the stars above. Nayla shakes her head. She snaps her hand to her whip.

NAYLA

What are you doing to me!

Suhail takes a breath.

SUHAIL

Just talking it out.

The bridges are alive with people walking in and out of them. Suhail continues walking towards them. Nayla sees him with Thaaban get smaller ahead. She runs to catch up.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - ROPE BRIDGE - NIGHT

The bridge wobbles, folding around Nayla's feet. She loses her balance. Thaaban helps her up. Suhail walks in front of them with complete control.

SUHAIL

Thank you, by the way.

He looks back.

NAYLA

For what?

She struggles to walk. The bridge's fabric is like soft sand.

SUHAIL

If only you knew how much light
you've brought to Noura's heart.

Nayla swings the bridge, tipping Suhail onto its rails. Sparks buzz from her holstered vine.

NAYLA

Don't ever mention her name.

Thaaban clicks his mouth. People behind her curse as they thread their way through.

SUHAIL

Why not?

Suhail smiles. Nayla passes him.

NAYLA
You say names like you earned
them!

Her foot catches the fabric. Suhail catches her. He is
framed by darkness. She is calmer in his hands.

NAYLA
You don't get to pull pieces of my
life and use them to steer me.

Suhail holds her a moment too long.

SUHAIL
But Noura is my sister.

Nayla throws his hands off. She steps back, bumping into
Thaaban.

NAYLA
What?

There is an ache beneath Suhail's smile.

SUHAIL
To see one star...

He extends a hand.

SUHAIL
...is not to know the sky.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - TIERED WATERWAYS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Nayla watches water flowing out a spinning waterwheel in an
arch above her. She leans on the rail where the water falls
into the tier below. On it, Suhail and Thaaban's warping
reflections appear behind hers. She looks between them.

NAYLA
Why did Rudaina leave you?

Thaaban smiles and puts a hand on Suhail. Suhail is looking
through the water's translucent surface.

SUHAIL
To protect Noura.

The city is hazy behind it. He turns to the food market.

SUHAIL
Want some soup?

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - FOOD MARKET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Fish. Spices. Breads. Smoke curls over the stalls. Laughter and music mingle. Suhail, Thaaban, and Nayla thread between them. A MAN stops in front of them.

MAN
Suhail!

Suhail shakes his head. Then, recognition.

SUHAIL
Oh, Majdi.

The man, MAJDI, looks down. Tears condense in his eyes.

MAJDI
Ever since she—

Suhail pulls him under his arms. Nayla watches. They don't speak. The crowd parts around them. Some look, whispering between each other. Majdi releases him.

MAJDI
Th-Thank you.

He turns away to wipe his face, then hurries into the crowd. Suhail leaves his own tears unwiped. Nayla comes to stand beside him.

SUHAIL
Looks like we missed our chance.

Suhail looks towards the long soup line. A large group joins the back. Thaaban grunts. Suhail laughs.

SUHAIL
Fine.

Thaaban jolts, running to the back of the line. Nayla's eyes haven't moved from where Majdi ran.

INT. WATER'S LOOM PALACE - COURT - NIGHT

The room buzzes with chatter over tea. At the far end of the carpet, Sheikha Layla looks up from a scroll she's signing.

LAYLA
Suhail!

She waves him over. As they approach, her eyes turn to meet Nayla's. The Sheikha smirks. She glances at Suhail.

LAYLA
Is that her?

NAYLA
Excuse me?

Layla chuckles.

LAYLA
You've haunted our poor child for too long.

Layla stands. Nayla's fists clench.

LAYLA
I will have my attendants set up a chamber. You can stay here as long as you like.

Suhail smiles at Nayla. He gestures to Layla.

SUHAIL
Nayla, this is Sheikha Layla.

Nayla straightens. Suhail touches Nayla's shoulder. She jumps.

LAYLA
Such rage in you, child.

Layla examines her eyes.

NAYLA
Why do you assume I would stay?

LAYLA
I don't. I only hope.

Layla smiles. Her eyes are heavy.

LAYLA
For your sake.

She looks at Suhail.

LAYLA
And his. It's time to allow your hearts to breathe.

Slowly. Nayla's fist unclenches.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - STREAM OUTPOST - DAY

Suhail leads Nayla through a maze of tents between a web of streaming water. The outpost is more populated than before. Nayla sees Thaaban running past a long line, to a stall marked by three stars. The stallkeeper stands up for him. They embrace. Nayla stares at the line.

NAYLA

Would it have something for me?

Suhail grins. Nayla stands at the end of the line. She looks back at Suhail. He presses his flute between his lips as a swarm of people crowd around him. His warm notes fill the air. Nayla smiles.

BEGIN MONTAGE - THE BRIDGE / THE OUTPOST

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE - BRIDGE SITE

Suhail, Thaaban, and Nayla stand at the brink above Climber's Valley. Hundreds work ahead. They swing off ropes. They climb on rails. A flowered device shoots sparks. Metal joins metal. Hands join hands. The workers move as if they were one. Nayla turns to Suhail.

NAYLA

This bridge. It is being seen as a threat.

Suhail is focused on the construction. A melody threads the construction's rhythm.

NAYLA

You know that, right?

SUHAIL

I...

Suhail looks north.

SUHAIL

...wish I did sooner.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - FABRIC MARKET

Fabric-laden stalls fill the square. Nayla and Suhail are walking between them. Thaaban is checking out a stall ahead. Suhail turns to Nayla.

SUHAIL
You wanted to be Head Minister,
right?

Nayla snaps.

NAYLA
I don't like when you do that.

Suhail is staring into her eyes.

SUHAIL
I can't help it.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - STREAM OUTPOST - LINE - DAY

His melody is richer. Fuller. People are sitting on the grass around him. Heads lean on other heads. Bodies tilt forward. Nayla peeks back at Suhail. Then at the line ahead. It moves forward.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - DUSK

Nayla and Suhail stand side by side. The city breathes before them.

NAYLA
Funny to think.

IN THE VOICE

Nayla's light calms the wisps around Suhail.

BACK ON THE BALCONY

They take a breath together.

NAYLA
The so-called Conqueror...

She smirks.

NAYLA
...is just a boy who has never
lifted a dagger.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - FABRIC MARKET

Suhail grabs a piece of fabric from one of the stalls. He shows Nayla.

SUHAIL
This weave won last year's
festival.

He turns to Thaaban.

SUHAIL
Remember that? It impressed
Farasha so much, she called it
ugly.

Thaaban chuckles and nods. Nayla squints at the weave's pattern.

SUHAIL
No matter the size of the fabric,
she said, this pattern would never
repeat.

Nayla feels the fabric. She pulls it closer to her eyes. Then, for a moment, a spark. Awe.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE - BRIDGE SITE

There are fewer workers on the bridge. It is almost complete. Nayla is looking at the other side of the canyon.

NAYLA
Is this really worth it?

Suhail turns to her.

NAYLA
After you answer the Shore's call,
then what?

A melody colors the space between them. Suhail pulls himself out of it.

SUHAIL
I didn't—No.

He looks back towards the bridge. It is now fully built.

SUHAIL
I can't think that far.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - STREAM OUTPOST - LINE - DAY

Suhail breaks into a countermelody. The crowd around him has doubled. Ahead of Nayla, there are only two people left.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - FABRIC MARKET

Suhail shakes his head. The MERCHANT insists, reaching the fabric closer to Suhail. Suhail takes it.

SUHAIL

Thank you.

He bows to the merchant and turns to Nayla.

SUHAIL

Got you a gift.

Nayla looks between Suhail and the merchant. She rolls her eyes. Reaches for it.

SUHAIL

Come north with me.

Both she and Suhail are holding the fabric.

SUHAIL

Show them you are not your father.

The fabric crumples around Nayla's fist. She lets go and stomps away.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM - GUEST CHAMBER BALCONY - DUSK

Suhail's smile fades.

SUHAIL

People are suffocating, Nayla.

Voices echo through the city beneath them. A man argues. A woman laughs.

NAYLA

The blight?

Nayla holds Suhail's hand over the balcony's rail.

NAYLA

But that's not in your control.

SUHAIL

It's not.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE - BRIDGE SITE

The Dam looms behind Suhail while people cheer by the bridge ahead of him.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
But together.

Suhail takes a breath and steps towards it.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
We might find a way.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - STREAM OUTPOST - LINE - DAY

Suhail's counter melody resolves. He reaches the last note. Lifts the flute from his lips. The crowd around him breaks into applause. Nayla approaches the stallkeeper. He reads down a list of names.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
With Noura.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SOUTHERN EDGE - BRIDGE SITE

Suhail and Nayla are specks against the bridge. They approach Thaaban waiting with hundreds. All the hands that it took. Suhail shakes them, one after another.

SUHAIL (V.O.)
With the Warden.

EXT. WATER'S LOOM OUTSKIRTS - STREAM OUTPOST - STALL - DAY

The stallkeeper finds Nayla's name on the list. He nods. Searches for something beneath the stall. Suhail approaches them as Nayla receives her item. A pin with three stars on it. Nayla turns it over. 'Head Minister.'

SUHAIL (V.O.)
With you.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "LOST FRAGMENT - ON THE FRAILTY OF
FORESIGHT"

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - BRIDGE

Suhail, Nayla, and Thaaban cross the impossible bridge, a group of Seers and a caravan marked with three stars behind them.

EXT. NEW WORLD - BARRACKS COURTYARD - DAY

A thousand New World soldiers stand in blocks. NAJIM stands before them. Hand on his head. The soldiers salute. A small figure emerges by the courtyard's entry. She marches closer. Fay. A thunder of applause and stomping feet. Najim holds up a hand as Fay approaches. The courtyard stills. He places a medal around her neck.

NAJIM
Congratulations, soldier.

Najim pins Fay's shoulder with a mark on her uniform. The red petal of Squad Leader. Fay turns to face the soldiers and salutes.

FAY
May my placement prove merit!

They salute. She stands straighter.

NAJIM
You are all dismissed for the day.

Najim watches the soldiers disperse, then places a hand on Fay's back.

NAJIM
Come with me.

INT. NEW WORLD - BARRACKS - MEETING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A large crystal table fills a small, padded room. A red petal marks the shoulders of all who are seated. At the table's head, Menkar glances at a Time Keeper.

MENKAR
You're late.

Najim and Fay walk in. They salute.

NAJIM
Apologies, sir.

Najim pulls up a seat for Fay. Menkar stands.

MENKAR
Rigel, son of Sheikh Mishal, is
performing well as acting Warden.

He walks around the table, tight between the chairs and the wall.

MENKAR
But the Conqueror is mobilizing
north while the true Warden is
losing his claim.

He looks directly at Najim.

MENKAR
How can we leverage this?

Three raised hands. Menkar points to one of them.

MENKAR
Yes, soldier?

The MAN shuffles in his seat.

SQUAD LEADER
We can claim control of the
Reserve ourselves.

Menkar walks to him.

MENKAR
The Free Tribes outnumber us
twenty to one.

He crouches down to his face.

MENKAR
Do you wish to kill us?

The man salutes.

SQUAD LEADER
No, sir!

Sweat drips down his forehead. Fay raises her hand. Menkar meets her eyes.

MENKAR
You.

FAY
Sir.

She stands.

FAY
Without our oversight, the Reserve
will always be at risk.

Najim smiles.

MENKAR
How so?

FAY
The flow would be dependent on one
person. If not this Rigel, or
Sheikh Altair, who's to say
another Cursed Warden wouldn't
emerge?

An eye rolls next to Fay. Menkar approaches her.

MENKAR
You're the survivor of Serpent's
Shore?

FAY
Yes, sir.

Menkar smiles.

MENKAR
What do you suggest?

Fay takes a moment before answering.

FAY
We extend our partnership with
Sheikh Mishal. If the Crystal City
secures the Reserve, so do we.

Menkar looks at Najim. Najim nods. Another raises their
hand. The scarred man. Adel.

MENKAR
Something on your mind, soldier?

Menkar huffs before turning to him.

ADEL
You are mistaking your priorities,
sir.

Breaths catch around the table. Menkar approaches.

MENKAR
What could possibly be more urgent
than securing the World Reserve?

Adel stands. He is taller than Menkar.

ADEL
Our breaths, sir.

Adel's single eye holds both of Menkar's.

ADEL
The blight. If it happened there
once, couldn't it happen again?

The hard line of Menkar's mouth softens into a smile.

ADEL
Thousands are at risk as we speak.

A figure steps out from the shadow at the table's head.

FARD
He's right.

Everyone turns. Fard.

FARD
There've already been reports of
isolated blight events since the
Buried City. Fire prevents them
from spreading, but their
source...

Fard's hand finds the table's edge. Holstered at his waist,
a device with a wilted flower.

FARD
No. What we have is thin.

Adel turns from Fard to Menkar.

ADEL
What are you planning to do?

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "END OF FRAGMENT"

EXT. METALLIC DESERT - SOUTHERN TRAIL - NIGHT

A caravan marked by three stars carves its way down a metallic slope. Behind it, a line drawn through grains catches starlight. Camel hooves etch the same line up the opposite rise. On its other side, a wide road of caravans and merchant stalls. People stare as the caravan threads its way through the crowded street.

INT./EXT. THREE-STAR CARAVAN - WAGON - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Mandarin flowerlight leaks from within one of the wagon's windows. People chase behind, crowding around it. Nayla looks out the window.

NAYLA

What are they saying?

The people outside are chanting, their voices muffled behind wind and stone. Suhail meets Nayla's eyes, then his father's.

SUHAIL

The Stars listen.

EXT. METALLIC DESERT - SOUTHERN TRAIL - STOPPED CARAVAN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The wagon halts. A boy stands in front of it, waving a flag with three stars. Suhail steps out. Nayla and Thaaban follow. People swarm around the boy, knocking him down.

PERSON ONE

The Voice of the Stars is here!

They're bumping into each other. One reaches their hand.

PERSON TWO

Our caravan is yours, Messiah.

Thaaban puts his arm out between Suhail and the mass of people. A face among them is pushing his way through. The Advocate from Serpent's Shore. He arrives at the front. His eyes are wide.

ADVOCATE

You're actually here.

The Advocate notices Nayla and clenches his fist.

ADVOCATE
What's that criminal doing with
you?

He spits.

ADVOCATE
Glory to our Shore!

Nayla moves towards him.

NAYLA
Murderer!

Suhail holds her back as she reaches to get to the Advocate.
Suhail holds her tighter. She calms. He is staring into her
eyes. Nayla jolts back, breaking free.

NAYLA
Sorry.

The crowd presses closer. Hands reach over Thaaban's
outstretched arm. Suhail takes out his flute. Presses it
between his lips. His breath transforms. The Melody of
Warmth. The crowd becomes quiet under the flute's spell. The
Advocate's eyes shut. He sways with the crowd. His eyes
open. He turns to Suhail.

ADVOCATE
How are you doing this?

The music stops. Suhail lifts the flute from his lips. He
puts a hand on the Advocate and chuckles.

SUHAIL
Lots of practice.

The Advocate looks between Suhail and Thaaban.

ADVOCATE
I rushed here as soon as I heard
you were crossing.

He steps closer.

ADVOCATE
Are the rumors true? Did you
really come to answer our call?

Thaaban is smiling. Suhail nods.

SUHAIL
It's true.

The Advocate howls, fists in the air. The crowd folds in behind him. Cheers. Cries. Knees to the ground. Suhail raises a hand.

SUHAIL
Hear my voice as I do yours!

They quiet.

SUHAIL
I've been called by many names.
Voice of the Stars. Messiah.
Conqueror.

A caravan stops nearby. More and more join the crowd.

SUHAIL
But I am only one man who sees
more than any should.

Thaaban puts a hand on his son.

SUHAIL
Hear my voice as I do yours!

Suhail looks directly at the Advocate.

SUHAIL
Do not call upon my name to excuse
violence.

The Advocate's eyes fall to the sand.

SUHAIL
Or to find peace.

Suhail approaches the crowd. He looks at one of them.

SUHAIL
Bader.

Another.

SUHAIL
Mariam.

Another.

SUHAIL
Altaf.

The crowd parts around him as he moves.

SUHAIL

Learn your own names.

He weaves his way back to the wagon.

SUHAIL

For we must call upon ourselves.

He stands on the wagon's steps, above all of them.

SUHAIL

Hear me as I hear you.

He scans their eyes.

SUHAIL

Not as one. As many.

Nayla watches the crowd of hundreds. Her eyes don't blink.
Her hand grips her whip.

SUHAIL

We will be better.

The crowd chants Suhail's name as Thaaban and Nayla return
to the wagon behind him.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - MAIN STREET - DUSK

Flags hang in rows above the road, three stars on each.
Beneath them, families crowd the street shoulder to
shoulder. A man holds his son's hand. An old woman wipes her
eyes. A father lifts his CHILD onto his shoulders so she can
see. They wait.

At the street's end, where the road extends over the edge of
Serpent's Canyon, a QUARTET plays on a platform. Titanium
drums and flowered strings. Above them, a canopy of mirrored
shards and blue Warden's Bloom. Merchants line the street. A
hand offers a gem. A merchant rejects it. The child on her
father's shoulder is waving a flag of her own. She sees
first.

CHILD

He's here!

Her words pass from mouth to mouth. They reach SHEIKH KATHIB
at the back of the crowd. He turns towards a metallic dune
on the setting green horizon. The three-starred caravan
crests the dune. Sheikh Kathib pushes his way to the front,
weaving between bodies that no longer part for him. The
caravan stops. The music stops. Suhail steps out. Everyone
is quiet.

Suhail looks across the crowd. They are holding their breaths. Thaaban and Nayla step out behind him. A voice calls.

VOICE

Criminal!

The edge of Nayla's lip quivers. The crowd surges forward.

CROWD MEMBER 1

Save us!

Voices pile over voices.

CROWD MEMBER 2

Traitor!

Some are hissing. Sheikh Kathib breaks through the front. Hair disheveled. Plant-fiber shirt wrinkled. He turns to face Suhail and then turns again to face his own people. Suhail holds up a hand. The crowd calms. Kathib's brows pinch. Suhail smiles.

SUHAIL

What happened to the music?

The quartet starts again. The crowd begins to sway. Sheikh Kathib's arm is wrapped around Suhail's. He leads him down the street towards the Serpent's edge.

KATHIB

It's all prepared! You just wait
till you see—

Kathib smacks his head.

KATHIB

Oh right.

Laughs nervously.

KATHIB

You probably already saw it!

People reach out as they pass. They call his name. Kathib pulls him away through a sparser crowd dancing to the music. Past the hanging stage. Thaaban and Nayla are walking fast behind, trying to catch up.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - CANYON EDGE - NIGHT

They walk west until the street is dim behind them. Kathib stops and turns to Suhail.

KATHIB

So, how do you like it?

Nayla arrives with Thaaban. She gasps. Ahead of them, a warehouse blocks the canyon. The same one that was bombed. Its metal is polished, as if brand new. Flowered conveyors are alive with movement and light around it. Etched on its surface are three giant stars. Suhail nods.

SUHAIL

I'm proud of how far you've come,
Kathib.

He turns to Nayla. She is staring at the warehouse. He holds her hand. Her fist opens against his palm. She cries.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - MUSIC PLATFORM - NIGHT

Backed by the joyous quartet, Suhail is dancing on stage, flute pressed between his lips. He plays around their notes. The crowd cheers below. They are all dancing. Nayla's eyes are closed, her hand reaching up towards the stage. Thaaban is jumping up and down, bumping into bodies around him.

Suhail plays faster. The quartet plays softer until they stop. Suhail's notes take over. A jazz improvisation of the most wonderful complexity. Notes leap and turn without warning. Nayla's eyes open. She is smiling wider than she ever has. Suhail dances as Sada once did, in the moment and uncaring. He meets Nayla's eyes.

IN THE VOICE

The black hole flickers with light.

BACK ON THE MUSIC PLATFORM

Suhail fumbles a note. The quartet catches it, joining back to carry his melody. Behind them, a shooting star. Suhail snaps around, looking for it. It's already gone.

INT. SERPENT'S SHORE - NAYLA'S SHACK - NIGHT

Suhail knocks on a mirrored door before he opens it. It reflects Nayla sitting up from her bed.

NAYLA

Something wrong?

Suhail just stands there. Nayla taps on her bed.

NAYLA
Come in.

SUHAIL
I...

He doesn't move.

NAYLA
What's wrong? You're scaring me.

SUHAIL
When I play. When the crowd moves.

He looks down.

SUHAIL
Am I moving them?

Nayla stands up from her bed and approaches him. She lifts his chin up.

NAYLA
One cannot move to music they
choose not to listen to.

Suhail steps fully into the room.

NAYLA
When Noura commanded me, I
couldn't choose. What you do is
invitation.

Suhail holds her gaze.

SUHAIL
Do you forgive me?

Nayla holds his. Then. Slowly.

NAYLA
I must.

The night's music returns in an echo.

SUHAIL
I almost forgot him.

NAYLA
What are you talking about?

Suhail takes her hand.

SUHAIL
When everything gets so loud.

Nayla slips her hand away and steps back.

SUHAIL
I find myself listening for you.

Suhail comes closer. Nayla looks back at her bed.

NAYLA
It's getting late.

SUHAIL
I'm falling in love with you,
Nayla.

Nayla's eyes return to Suhail's. Then, she puts her hand back in his.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Wisps of light are drawn into the black hole moving through the void.

INT. SERPENT'S SHORE - SUHAIL'S SHACK - NIGHT

Suhail jumps awake. Thaaban mumbles in his sleep next to him.

SUHAIL
I can see it!

Thaaban's eyes flutter open.

SUHAIL
Whoa!

Suhail is grinning from ear to ear.

SUHAIL
The Buried City is amazing!

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "LOST FRAGMENT - ON THE MEMORY OF WORDS"

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - ALDEBARAN'S STUDY - NIGHT

Fard peeks through the doorway. The room is empty. He enters and shuts the door. His eyes lock onto dusty metal tablets on a shelf. Fard approaches them. He looks through them. Stops. Faint green light seeps onto his face. Etched onto the metal, an Obelisk. Musical symbols pulse around it. The door opens. Fard drops the tablet.

RIGEL

Fard?

Fard turns.

FARD

Oh, hey, Rigel.

RIGEL

Shouldn't you be on your way to the New World?

FARD

I tried to go back.

Fard looks at the tablet on the floor.

FARD

But I've really missed this place.

RIGEL

Yeah.

RIGEL brushes his finger on Aldebaran's dusty desk. The dust parts.

RIGEL

I understand.

His foot catches the tablet on the floor. He picks it up. Turns it over.

RIGEL

The Forgotten Ballad.

Rigel chuckles.

RIGEL

Aldebaran would rise out of his grave to hear that song.

The edge of Fard's smile falls.

FARD
Some experts believe the original
words were translated in the wrong
order.

The Obelisk pulses within Rigel's eyes.

FARD
If so, the song's true name would
be The Ballad of the Forgotten.

Fard takes the tablet from Rigel's hand and places it back
on the shelf.

FARD
You make an excellent Warden,
Rigel.

They hug. Rigel steps back.

RIGEL
Thank you, Fard.

His eyes fall to his feet.

RIGEL
I'm sorry.

Fard stiffens.

RIGEL
I was blinded by jealousy. I
couldn't see you for what you
were.

Rigel holds out his hand.

RIGEL
My cousin.

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "END OF FRAGMENT"

INT. SERPENT'S SHORE - SHEIKH'S SHACK - DAY

Broken mirrors join Suhail, Thaaban, Nayla, and Kathib
around a table. Blue light washes over a woven map. Kathib
points at a road tracing the Serpent's north face.

KATHIB
We arranged for two of your
outposts here on the Southern
Trail.

Suhail is staring at Nayla. Kathib's finger moves north.

KATHIB
And Union's Point wants one here.

He notices Suhail's gaze moving off the map.

KATHIB
Suhail?

Suhail smiles towards him.

SUHAIL
Sorry. How can I help?

KATHIB
Did you hear anything I—

Kathib stops himself. Laughs.

KATHIB
Oh, right! Of course you did!

Kathib pats his back.

KATHIB
The stars do not bind by debt, my
friend!

Suhail's eyes are already somewhere else.

IN THE VOICE

The black hole has stopped moving.

BACK AT THE TABLE

He snaps to Thaaban.

SUHAIL
It's in Fortune's Fulcrum.

Then to Nayla.

SUHAIL
Noura's there.

Kathib turns between them, then looks back down at the map.

INT. THREE-STAR CARAVAN - WAGON - DAY - TRAVELING

A mandarin chandelier wobbles between Suhail, Nayla, and Thaaban. Nayla holds it still.

NAYLA
How long has this hole in the
Voice been there?

Suhail looks out the window. Hundreds follow on foot behind them.

SUHAIL
I think...

His brows curl.

SUHAIL
Since I first spoke?

He looks at Thaaban. Thaaban nods.

SUHAIL
It feels weird not being able to
see her.

Nayla holds his hand.

NAYLA
Noura can handle herself.

Suhail puts his forehead to the top of Nayla's hand. He kisses it. Soft. His grip tightens. Then he falls.

NAYLA
Suhail?

Thaaban falls over him. They convulse, struggling for air. Thaaban reaches for Nayla.

NAYLA
Oh no.

Nayla's mouth hangs open as Suhail and Thaaban suffocate in front of her.

NAYLA
Help!

She bangs the wagon's door. A bump on the road. The chandelier swings. No answer. The wagon rolls on. Thaaban and Suhail are shaking violently. Gasping. Nayla falls beside them. She finds herself holding both their hands. But the shaking doesn't stop. Their heads slam into each other. Suhail's eyes are clasped shut. Thaaban croaks as his eyes bulge.

Nayla begins to hum. Note by note, she searches for a familiar melody. A remembered phrase of Suhail's flute echoes beneath her humming. Her notes find its warmth. Nayla's voice is beautiful as she hums the Melody of Warmth. Within it, Suhail and Thaaban regain their breaths. They pant. Grab their seats. Reorient themselves.

Nayla swallows Suhail under her arms. Suhail lets himself be held, falling into her shoulders. His lips brush against her ears.

SUHAIL
We need her.

She hushes him and strokes his hair.

EXT. UNION'S POINT - CENTRAL PLATFORM - DAY

Suhail stands on a small platform, encircled by domed huts and a mass of faces.

SUHAIL
We must be better!

The massive crowd below him roars.

INT. UNION'S POINT - INN - DAY

An INNKEEPER smiles at Suhail as he walks in with Thaaban and Nayla.

INNKEEPER
I never doubted you'd come.

The wall behind her is marked by three stars. Suhail walks faster.

SUHAIL
Badriya!

He opens his arms. The innkeeper stands up from her desk. Suhail embraces her. Nayla and Thaaban can't help but smile. Suhail pulls back and winks.

SUHAIL
Thanks for taking care of this
place.

BADRIYA smiles.

BADRIYA
It's the least I can do.

Her smile drops as quickly as it came. She looks back
towards the stairs.

BADRIYA
Bader! Get down!

A voice from above.

BADER (O.S.)
I'm busy, Mama!

BADRIYA
He's here, boy!

Nayla and Suhail glance at each other and chuckle. Badriya
turns back to them.

BADRIYA
I'm sorry about that. Do you want
some tea?

Suhail shakes his head, still smiling.

SUHAIL
Just two rooms please.

Thaaban turns towards the stairs. BADER, the scavenger from
the sky slings, stands with a BOY holding his hand. Bader
meets Suhail's eyes, then looks down at his boy.

BADER
Go on. Go say hi.

The boy waddles to Suhail. Badriya and Bader watch. The boy
holds his hands behind his back. He shuffles in place.

CHILD
Thank you.

Looks back at his father. Bader nods. The boy turns back to
Suhail.

CHILD
For saving my life.

He hugs Suhail for less than a moment, then runs to his father. Behind Suhail, Nayla catches Thaaban pressing a fist to his chest.

INT. UNION'S POINT - INN - HALLWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Thaaban and Suhail approach a door. Nayla approaches another. She glances back.

NAYLA

Suhail?

Suhail turns. Thaaban slips past him and enters the room alone.

INT. UNION'S POINT - INN - NAYLA'S ROOM - DAY

Suhail and Nayla are lying on a bed, lit dim blue by Warden's Bloom beginning to wilt.

SUHAIL

I need you to stay here.

Suhail sits up.

SUHAIL

With my father.

Nayla sits up beside him.

NAYLA

But I know her better than anyone.

Suhail holds her eyes.

IN THE VOICE

The black hole in the void.

BACK IN THE ROOM

SUHAIL

This darkness. It might be dangerous.

A Melody of Longing echoes through the Voice.

SUHAIL

I can't lose you too.

Nayla holds his hand under the bed's fabrics.

NAYLA
Noura won't believe you.

Suhail grins.

NAYLA
You'll need me.

Suhail cups his other hand over hers.

SUHAIL
I do need you.

He releases.

SUHAIL
Here.

He holds her eyes. Parts her hair from her face.

SUHAIL
Help set up the outpost. Let these
people see you for who you really
are.

There is an ache in her eyes.

SUHAIL
Not just Akrab's daughter.

He smiles at her.

SUHAIL
But a star of your own.

He kisses her forehead. And she falls into his arms.

EXT. METALLIC DESERT - TRAIL - DUSK

Suhail steps out of his wagon. Followers mob around him. They bump against each other, reaching out to him. He is suffocated by them as he walks. They press on him. Call out his name. Suhail stops, an ant between ants.

SUHAIL
Please! Be calm!

The crowd is louder than him.

CROWD
Voice of the Stars!

Suhail presses his hands to his ears.

CROWD

Messiah!

He breathes. His hand falls to his waist. The stone flute. He presses it between his lips. And exhales. The first note. The crowd cheers. Another note. Fewer voices cheering. Suhail's notes weave into a blanket. Reaching hands fall. Bodies press looser around him. The crowd is fully calm, embraced by the melody's warmth. They part.

Suhail marches ahead of them as he continues playing. The crowd follows. They find themselves marching in unison. Far on the horizon, there is a blinding light. He covers his eyes, unable to look directly ahead. He steps towards it. It gets brighter.

FLASH: Sada, Altair's son, suffocating in his bed.

Suhail's flute drops onto the metallic sand. Tears stream down his face. He braces. Another step. Even brighter.

He pushes forward until all he can see is pure white. Deep within it, a woman's scream.

SOHA (V.O.)

Kill me!

Another voice.

RIGEL (V.O.)

My feelings are not yours to take!

Noura's.

NOURA (V.O.)

I invented those!

Suhail is crawling on the sand, tears streaming down his face. His nails dig forward. The voices overlap. The light pulses in waves. Guilt. Shame. Grief. He presses against the sand. And looks ahead. The light burns with unimaginable pain. Faces across the Buried City. Suffocating.

Suhail stands. Turns around. And walks back on his own footprints as the green sky goes dark behind him.

SUHAIL

Oh, my poor child.

He wipes his eyes. His gaze steadies. Determined.

EXT. UNION'S POINT - OUTPOST - LATER

Nayla oversees followers joining metal on a half-built outpost. Thaaban marks a ledger as supplies are placed nearby. Everyone turns. Suhail has arrived. His hands are trembling. His tears dried. Nayla runs to him and holds his face.

NAYLA
What's wrong?

Checks it for wounds.

NAYLA
Where's Noura?

Suhail hugs her. He pulls back and takes her hands.

SUHAIL
We must be united. All of us.

He turns to the growing crowd.

SUHAIL
The Free Tribes, The New World.
Together, we may end this blight.
Nayla.

He holds her eyes.

SUHAIL
I can't see a world where I could
breathe without you.

Her hands grip his tighter.

SUHAIL
Would you marry me?

She snaps her hands away. Steps back. Thaaban's mouth opens. The crowd is silent. Nayla stares at Suhail. Then, she kisses him. Thaaban's open mouth breaks into a grin. The crowd cheers around them.

INT. UNION'S POINT - INN - ROOM - NIGHT

Diffused blue flowerlight warps along a metal table. Thaaban, Nayla, and Suhail are seated around it in the small room. Nayla sees Suhail's reflection bend.

NAYLA
The darkness is Sheikh Altair?

Thaaban tilts his head.

NAYLA
What does that even mean?

On the table, a Warden's Bloom in a crystal vase. Suhail cups his hands over it. The reflections die. The room dims.

SUHAIL
What do you see?

Nayla takes a moment, then crosses her arms.

NAYLA
Nothing. Darkness.

Suhail opens his hands. Blue spills back across the metal.

SUHAIL
Did the light ever go away?

She lets out a soft chuckle.

NAYLA
Of course not. Your hands stopped
it from reaching me.

Thaaban's eyes hang on the bloom.

SUHAIL
We speak of Sight as if it were
many gifts.

Suhail turns the vase, slow, scattering sparkles over Nayla.

SUHAIL
It was never many. I think there
is only the Voice.

He looks up at her.

SUHAIL
Your trails...intention ripples
ahead of the body. You hear it,
and you call it the future.

Nayla stills.

NAYLA
Tricks on tricks.

SUHAIL
My father feels every voice at
once, but none clearly. Isn't that
right?

Thaaban presses a fist to his chest, then nods.

SUHAIL
You read the surface, Baba.

Suhail looks at his hands.

SUHAIL
I drown in every drop.

Nayla leans in.

NAYLA
And Sheikh Altair?

SUHAIL
The stories say Sight cannot reach
him.

Suhail shakes his head.

SUHAIL
They have it backwards. Every
voice that nears him, he gathers,
and holds. Sight cannot leave him.

The light bends between the three of them.

SUHAIL
When I walked toward him...

Suhail finds himself breathing faster.

SUHAIL
I've never felt a heart like that,
Baba. So much, held for so long. I
could barely approach.

His breath shudders.

SUHAIL
The darkness was never dark. It is
the Warden's own hand.

Thaaban places a hand over his son's.

SUHAIL
Right now, Sheikh Altair needs
Noura more than us.

Suhail stands up and kisses his father's forehead. Then, he turns to Nayla, and smirks.

SUHAIL
For once, Alia and Tarek may be
onto something.

INT. UNION'S POINT - INN - NAYLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

NAYLA
You think they're right?

Nayla sits up on her bed. Suhail shrugs.

SUHAIL
It's better than what the
so-called experts have come up
with.

NAYLA
And what is that exactly?

Suhail looks away.

NAYLA
What is it? You're worrying me.

He reaches for her hand.

SUHAIL
Sorry, my heartbeat.

Nayla flinches.

NAYLA
Don't call me that.

Suhail looks into her eyes.

NAYLA
Just say it already.

He breathes.

SUHAIL
They suspect Sheikh Altair's
movements are connected to the
blight.

NAYLA
Why would they think that?

SUHAIL

Fard was there when it happened.

A corner of Suhail's lip falls.

SUHAIL

He claims that it was not the
first time flowers have dimmed
around the Sheikh.

Nayla hangs on those words for a moment. Suhail nods.

SUHAIL

If it is true, then my own Sight
has also been...

NAYLA

No.

She takes his hand.

NAYLA

Alia and Tarek must be right. It
has to be the rainwater.

Suhail nods again, his eyes somewhere else.

INT. SERPENT'S SHORE - SHEIKH'S SHACK - NIGHT

All sides of Suhail and Nayla are exposed across the mosaic
of mirrors. Nayla's hands multiply through them as she takes
Suhail's. They stand alone. Nayla is dressed in a wedding
gown. Three stars pinned on her shoulder. Suhail is in a
white robe. It is cut so precisely it looks sewn onto him.
Nayla fixes his collar.

NAYLA

I need to get this Farasha to
weave me a dress.

She steps back and sees him whole.

NAYLA

Her work is stunning.

Suhail watches their fractured reflections stitch across the
shack's walls.

SUHAIL

Do you think she'll like me?

Nayla leans closer.

NAYLA
Noura has always had a sense for
what is right.

BEGIN MONTAGE - THE WEDDING / NOURA'S RETURN

A drum beats.

EXT. SERPENT'S SHORE - DECORATED OVERHANG - DUSK

Suhail lifts Nayla's veil under flowerlight and starlight as the ringed planet sets. Thaaban chants behind them. In the canyon beyond, the jungle shimmers with fog. A beat. Among the layered robes, vine-fiber, and fur-lined leather of wedding GUESTS, Noura's eyes.

NOURA
Nayla!

Nayla breaks from a kiss, turning to Noura. Beat.

NOURA
TELL ME!

Suhail falls to the ground. Looks up.

SUHAIL
Love, Noura.

Noura's eyes are burning. Beat. Noura is on her knees, trembling.

GUEST 2
Witch!

GUEST 3
Curse!

Suhail turns to the crowd.

SUHAIL
No! There are no curses in our
world.

Beat.

INT. SERPENT'S SHORE - SHEIKH'S SHACK

Suhail reaches. His eyes are filled with tears.

SUHAIL
If only you knew how incredible
you were.

Beat.

SUHAIL
We need a Scholar.

Noura steps back. The drum rolls.

END MONTAGE

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE

NOURA
OK.

Noura's hand rests on Thaaban's arm.

NOURA
What do you need me to do?

Thaaban collapses onto the grass. Noura's eyes are back. She sees him. He looks up at his daughter from the ground, panting. Then smiles. The drumming blurs into a single note.

Noura extends a hand to Thaaban. He grabs it, and she pulls him up into an embrace.

NOURA
Are you OK?

He nods.

NOURA
No. If this is hurting you, we
must stop it.

A beak taps her shoulder. Noura spins. Her breath stops. The shimmer has a face. The Anqa. Warm breath brushes her cheek. She is small in its dark eye. It waits, standing on one foot. Noura reaches out. It bows its head. She looks back to Thaaban.

NOURA
I think it likes me!

Thaaban is smiling. She scratches the bird. It turns its neck, guiding Noura's hand.

NOURA
No way, no way, no way.

She glances at the tag on its foot. 'For Tarek.' Her smile fades.

NOURA
I miss them, Baba.

Thaaban hugs her from behind.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

NOURA
So...

Noura sits on a log with the Elder and Thaaban around a fire.

NOURA
Every child must be presented?

The Elder hisses.

ELDER
Of course not!

Noura smirks. Thaaban catches it and chuckles.

ELDER
Our sacred lineage can only be
preserved through our girls. The
Voice wakes in the boys they bear.

Noura's smirk fades.

NOURA
And the girls it refuses?

The fire cracks.

ELDER
The pond keeps them.

Noura stills. The Elder avoids her eyes.

ELDER
It is rare.

NOURA
Mama left...to prevent my
presentation?

Thaaban holds her hand.

ELDER

She was the first to exile
herself. Until your brother.

Thaaban turns to the Elder. His jaw tightens.

ELDER

Now, the stars turn their face
from us. They veil our jungle in
blinding mist!

Noura is distracted, staring at the flickering flames. Her
fingers trill to their phantom beats.

NOURA

What about that Seer in the Buried
City?

The Elder clicks her tongue.

ELDER

Farasha's boy?

She looks away.

ELDER

I exiled him myself.

The old woman shoves herself up. Her back gives. She
stumbles. Thaaban catches her.

ELDER

No one is to take from the Sacred
Pond.

The Elder meets Thaaban's eyes. His eyes do not leave hers.
Noura stands.

NOURA

Why did he take from the pond?

The Elder's eyes cut sideways to Noura.

ELDER

You ask too many questions, child.

Her shoulders drop.

ELDER

Sheikh Aldebaran journeyed the
entire world to cure his wife.

She pulls away from Thaaban to stand on her own.

ELDER

By the time he arrived here, tales
of his romantic odyssey became
myth. And that boy was compelled
to help.

She shakes her head.

ELDER

That poor child.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - TENT - NIGHT

Noura tiptoes out of the tent. The village is asleep.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - ROOT TUNNEL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

She crouches through the arched roots of sprawling trees.
Each step wakes them, and they fade behind her in the same
rhythm.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - FOG - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Shimmering fog. Leaves part as she pushes through them.
Something moves to her left. She doesn't look. Her fingers
trill to the jungle's phantom pulse.

IN THE VOICE

Wisps of light shoot upwards ahead of a fuzzy Noura. Drums
grow louder.

BACK IN THE JUNGLE

She turns towards where the wisps are coming from. Parts the
leaves.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - NIGHT

Starlit. The Anqa is sipping from the pond, its shimmer
dissolving into the canopy.

NOURA

Curious.

Noura smiles.

NOURA

How did you find your way here?

Across the pond, the Obelisk hovers. She passes the Anqa. It tilts its head towards her, feathers settled. Noura laughs.

NOURA

Don't worry, the water is all yours.

She stops in front of the Obelisk. It's humming.

NOURA

I'm sorry, Baba.

She touches it. Her face crunches. The Obelisk is spreading wisps of light across the sky. Noura snaps her hand back as if she touched hot water. Behind her, the Anqa is staring up at where the wisps would be.

NOURA

Can you see them too? Is that how you find your way?

The Anqa blinks at her. Slow. She chuckles and gives it a good scruff. She turns back to the Obelisk. Noura listens. The hum is one note. She listens harder. The note has edges. Her fingers lift. They trill.

The single hum opens into many voices. Like drum beats moving so fast they become one note. One voice, then two, then ten, then a torrent. Her fingers trill faster as the voices keep coming. She stops. Takes a breath. Presses her hand back to the Obelisk. The voices crash over her. Muffled cries. Cries of pain. She holds.

NOURA

Suhail...Suhail...

Her eyes are shut.

NOURA

Hear my voice.

She snaps her hand back, panting. The Anqa settles beside her. She scratches its head. Its feathers ruffle under her fingers. She meets one of its eyes.

NOURA

I guess it's no use.

Noura lies back against the bird. Sees her reflection on the pond's water. It's shimmering. She looks towards the canopy's edge, where the jungle's fog is denser. It shimmers the same way. Her face shifts, almost as if she caught an idea and it slipped. She rubs her head against the Anqa.

NOURA

Maybe I'm not cut out to be a Scholar.

The Obelisk's hum shifts. Noura turns. Among the layered voices, one rises clear. The Melody of Warmth. She presses her hand back to the Obelisk. A single wisp pulses brighter than the rest. The other voices fade behind it.

INTERCUT - SACRED POND / SHEIKH'S SHACK

INT. SERPENT'S SHORE - SHEIKH'S SHACK - NIGHT

Nayla is humming while holding Suhail's arm. His eyes are rolled up.

SUHAIL

She found us.

Noura tilts her head to the sky, eyes shut.

NOURA

Nayla. Is that you?

NAYLA

Yes, Noura. It's us. We didn't think this would work.

NOURA

The Melody pointed the way.

Noura's voice catches.

NOURA

This is amazing.

A new voice, closer.

SUHAIL

Dimming flowers were sighted near the Buried City.

Noura's hand flies to her mouth. She stumbles back. Bumps into the Anqa. It's staring at the same patch of sky she was. She shakes her head. Presses her hand back.

SUHAIL
Noura? Are you there?

NOURA
Yes. Yes, I'm here. What should I do?

SUHAIL
Alia and Tarek refused my call.
They believe I'm an Imposer.

NAYLA
(gently)
We think they're onto something,
Noura. They're in the Buried City.

SUHAIL
(tighter)
And Mama is on her way there too.

Noura's eyes move beneath her lids.

NOURA
What? Why?

A pause.

SUHAIL
She's looking for you.

SUHAIL
(quickly)
Get to the Buried City as soon as
you can. The three of you, you
will find a way.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Melody flickers. Noura pulls her hand from the Obelisk.
The Elder is behind her, eyes wide.

ELDER
What have you done, child?

She grabs Noura's arm.

ELDER
You really are Rudaina's daughter.

Noura yanks her arm away.

NOURA
Yes. I am.

She turns to the Anqa.

NOURA

May I?

The Anqa tilts its head. Noura presses her hand to it. She feels its breath.

ELDER

That creature is Sacred!

Noura ignores. And climbs it. The Elder hurries towards her, struggling to keep pace. The Anqa screeches. The Elder falls back. Noura is already sitting on it.

NOURA

Easy.

It stretches its wings. The Anqa's shadow swallows the Elder.

ELDER

Get off that bird, now!

It starts flapping. It lifts. Noura shrieks. She watches the Elder get smaller and smaller under her until there is nothing but a canopy of trees.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - ABOVE THE CANOPY - NIGHT

Noura scruffs it as it hovers.

NOURA

I saw you staring at the—

It soars, gliding over the trees. Noura screams. It arches down, dropping fast. Noura presses her body against it. Holds it tight. Her face buried in its feathers. Eyes shut.

NOURA

That's the wrong way!

The wind is loud over her words. The Anqa banks against the canyon's face, so close over the treetops. It flaps back up. Higher. Slower. Noura opens her eyes.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - SKY SLINGS - NIGHT

A sky sling zips past her face. Another is zipping fast towards them.

NOURA

Watch out!

The Anqa dodges it, flying towards Al-Lawha's western edge.

NOURA

We need to get to the Buried—

EXT. AL-LAWHA - WESTERN EDGE - CLOUD SEA - NIGHT -
CONTINUOUS

The Anqa dives off the edge into a sea of clouds. Noura screams. She shuts her eyes again. They're in free fall. Al-Lawha's face gets denser with fauna behind them. The clouds are sparser. And sparser.

EXT. WORLD BELOW - ABOVE THE WATER - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Anqa pulls its wings apart, catching air. Noura opens her eyes. Surrounding Al-Lawha, water as far as she can see.

NOURA

Whoa.

They glide over it. Noura stretches her hands wide, catching the same air. Her hair whips in the wind.

NOURA

Woohooooooooo!

Water shoots behind them. They are soaring around Al-Lawha. A wall out of the ocean, into the clouds. The surface below reflects their world back at them. She meets her own eyes.

NOURA

What the New World would give to
see this.

Al-Lawha is so large, its face extends on both sides seemingly forever. The Anqa traces the wall as it flies higher. And higher. And higher.

EXT. AL-LAWHA - OUTER WALL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

They are midway up. Noura spots someone on the edge. She squints. It's a CLIMBER. He is waving them over.

CLIMBER

Help!

Noura pulls on the Anqa's feathers.

NOURA
He needs our help!

The Anqa screeches and twirls upside down. Noura's arms are pressed around it. Her legs dangling over the clouds.

NOURA
Stop it!

The Anqa is erratic. Noura can't control it. She shuts her eyes.

ALTAIR (V.O.)
You must surrender to his rhythm.

Noura opens her eyes. She watches the man on the wall hanging by one hand.

NOURA
No.

INTERCUT - THE VOICE / AL-LAWHA'S OUTER WALL

IN THE VOICE

The climber is a faint thread.

WITH NOURA

Noura listens. Past the bird. To the man ahead. His voice emerges. Her fingers trill. She taps the bird to his rhythm.

IN THE VOICE

The climber's wisp blazes with her tapping. As bright as an Obelisk.

EXT. AL-LAWHA - OUTER WALL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Anqa dives towards him.

NOURA
It worked!

She can't even hear herself. They land right below the man. Noura looks up at him. Her brows furrow.

NOURA
Shahid?

He is hanging by his fingertips. She waves him down.

NOURA

Jump on!

Shahid drops, landing behind Noura. He grabs onto her tight. Noura's fingers trill to Al-Lawha's pulse. The Anqa ascends. They rise over old climbing hitches. More hitches set closer together the higher up they go. Shahid looks down at the clouds.

SHAHID

No! We must go back! This is our only chance.

EXT. SERPENT CANYON - NORTHEAST EDGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

They land above Climber's Valley. Shahid steps off the Anqa. He doesn't look at it. His feet find the ground unevenly, like he forgot how to use them.

NOURA

How long were you stuck there?

He looks at Noura. Past her.

NOURA

Shahid, it's me, Noura.

He blinks.

SHAHID

Many, many days.

NOURA

Well, you're safe now.

SHAHID

Did you see it?

NOURA

See what?

He turns towards Al-Lawha's edge.

SHAHID

The bottom.

Noura opens her mouth. Closes it.

NOURA

There's nothing to see. It's all water.

Shahid is still for a moment.

SHAHID

Oh.

He turns away.

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "LOST FRAGMENT - ON THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT"

INT. CLIMBER'S VALLEY - JADY'S HUT

Sheikh Altair and SHEIKH MISHAL sit across from Sheikh Jady. A climbing rope sways outside the open window, its shadow cutting the table between them.

JADY

Mind control?

Jady laughs. Mishal slaps his palms to the table.

MISHAL

It's real, boy.

Jady shakes his head.

JADY

That's just New World propaganda.

Altair exhales.

ALTAIR

I am glad to learn that is not the Conqueror's way.

Jady leans back on his chair.

JADY

You aggrandize that boy. Calling him Conqueror.

ALTAIR

Help me understand, then.

Altair holds Jady's eyes.

ALTAIR

Why did you allow the bridge?

Jady turns away from him to Mishal.

JADY
You should know, my Sheikh. It was
your own ancestors that
established the Free Tribes.

MISHAL
Do you mock me, boy?

JADY
On the contrary. When I faced that
choice, I looked to them for
guidance. Their core tenet.

Altair smiles with warmth.

ALTAIR
Freedom of movement.

Mishal's gaze sharpens on Jady.

JADY
Any tribe who wishes to break
away, may do so with full support
from the Warden and the World
Reserve.

Jady looks at Altair.

JADY
Isn't that so?

Mishal's hands curl into fists.

MISHAL
That Conqueror is dangerous! He
would claim the Reserve for
himself!

Altair places a hand on Mishal's shoulder. Jady's hand
settles on the other.

JADY
That boy is no conqueror. He is
Suhail.

Altair holds the name in his mouth for a moment. The ache
behind his smile widens.

ALTAIR
Tell me about him.

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "END OF FRAGMENT"

EXT. BURIED CITY - ABOVE THE FLOWER MEADOWS - NIGHT

Noura soars over a moat of blue light around half-buried walls. A man, so small below, is waving her over. The patch of flowers beside him flickers. Noura trills. The Anqa dives down to him. Adel.

EXT. BURIED CITY - FLOWER MEADOWS - NIGHT

He's holding a flowered flamethrower.

ADEL
You're late!

Adel tosses it to her.

ADEL
From Suhail.

NOURA
What?

She looks at the device.

NOURA
I was sent for Alia and Tarek.

Her eyes open wide. She looks down at Adel. More flowers are flickering around him.

ADEL
Burn them before they spread.

Adel catches his breath.

ADEL
The Anqa can outrun them. We
can't.

He salutes, and runs. Noura stares at the flamethrower in her hands. More patches of blue across the meadow's rim flicker. The Anqa screeches and flies higher up. Noura looks down at the beautiful flowers. Metallic farms scatter between them, their roofs catching the flowerlight like still water.

One by one, flowers near the flickering patches go dark. Noura's mouth opens. The flamethrower shakes in her trembling hands. The dark patches spread further. She points it to the sky. And pulls the trigger. The dark sky roars with firelight. The fire reflects in her eyes. She looks down at the beautiful flowers. Points the flamethrower over the darkened patch. Pulls.

A cloud of fire blasts out of the flamethrower. It widens as it falls. Another patch goes dark.

NOURA

There!

The Anqa doesn't listen. It flies higher. Noura spots a metallic farm within the darkness. Her finger trills.

INT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

A MAN and a WOMAN are in bed together. The woman wakes up, her sweating face lit by firelight through the window. She shakes the man up. The farmer stretches. He groans. Opens his eyes.

The farmer jumps up and pulls the woman with him.

EXT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

They run out of the farmhouse. The woman turns. Sees the sky. Then collapses to her knees.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ABOVE THE BURNING MEADOWS - NIGHT

The dark flowers are swallowed by flame. Noura releases the trigger. The fire spreads. Alive. Uncontrollable. Noura's hands fling to her mouth, dropping the flamethrower. It falls down to the metallic flower farm way below.

NOURA

Take me down!

The fire's heat washes over them. The Anqa flies higher.

NOURA

No, down!

It turns south. Noura trills. The Anqa doesn't turn. It continues flying towards the Obelisk's light. Noura looks behind. The spreading fire reflects from her horrified eyes.

INT. THREE-STAR CARAVAN - WAGON - NIGHT

Suhail is lying on Nayla's lap.

SUHAIL
I'm so sorry, Noura.

Nayla is stroking his hair.

NAYLA
It was the only chance we had.
She hums the Melody of Warmth into his ears.

SUHAIL
The darkness.
Suhail sits up. Nayla stops humming.

SUHAIL
Sheikh Altair is heading back to
the Buried City.
She smiles, just barely.

NAYLA
It is about time you two met.

EXT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - FLOWER MEADOW HILL - DAY

Suhail waits atop the hill. Where Altair met Sada. In the valley below, Nayla looks both ways. Then approaches with Tarek and Alia behind her.

ALIA
Are you sure he's safe?

Alia walks slower.

SUHAIL
Rainwater.

Suhail's voice carries down the meadow. Alia and Tarek stop. They turn to each other. Nayla pulls them forward.

NAYLA
Come on, we don't have much time.

Suhail watches them approach. He extends a hand.

SUHAIL
It is my pleasure to finally meet
you two.

Alia looks him up and down.

ALIA
You're the Conqueror?

Suhail's urgency betrays his smile.

SUHAIL
I'm just Suhail.

Alia looks at his open hand. Tarek shakes it.

TAREK
I'm Tarek.

NAYLA
He knows.

Nayla laughs. Alia crosses her arms.

ALIA
What do you want from us?

SUHAIL
I...just want you to speak to
Noura.

TAREK
Was that really her last night?

Tarek looks between Nayla and Suhail.

TAREK
Who burned the flowers?

Suhail's eyes fall to the grass.

SUHAIL
No, I'm to blame for that.

A moment. Alia smiles.

ALIA
Good call.

Tarek shifts.

TAREK
Though fire is a bit drastic,
don't you think?

Alia looks around.

ALIA
Where is she?

SUHAIL
This may feel a little weird.

Suhail raises his arm. Alia looks at it.

NAYLA
Go on.

Nayla is nodding. Alia grabs his arm.

INTERCUT - FLOWER MEADOW HILL / SACRED VILLAGE

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY

Noura is holding onto Thaaban's arm. His eyes are rolled up.

NOURA
Alia?

Noura's voice cracks.

NOURA
I am so, so sorry.

Tears stream from Alia's eyes.

ALIA
No, I should've been there for
you, Noura.

Tarek doesn't blink at the sight of Alia holding Suhail with his eyes rolled up. Noura sniffles.

NOURA
I didn't mean to hurt you.

Alia's breath shudders.

ALIA (V.O.)
I know.

Thaaban is shaking. Noura lets go. Alia's eyes are back. She loses her balance.

ALIA
Where did she go?

She finds Tarek's hand. Steadies.

EXT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - FLOWER MEADOW HILL - DAY -
CONTINUOUS

On the distant horizon behind them, New World soldiers are marching towards the Buried City. Hundreds of them.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Noura crouches down to her father, panting in the grass.

NOURA
Are you OK, Baba?

Thaaban nods. He reaches his arm out.

NOURA
No, Baba, I don't want to hurt
you.

He grunts and reaches again, looking into Noura's eyes. Noura hesitates, then grabs it.

INTERCUT - SACRED VILLAGE / FLOWER MEADOW HILL

NOURA
Alia?

NOURA (V.O.)
Suhail says you saw rainwater
return the flowerlight.

Alia's eyes are elsewhere.

ALIA
Yeah, but we were never able to
replicate it.

Her hand is gripping Suhail's arm.

ALIA (V.O.)
We tried so many times.

NOURA
Think with me, Alia. What was
different about the rain that day?

Thaaban is foaming at the mouth.

NOURA
Quick! Anything!

Thaaban shakes. Alia's eyes squeeze shut. She grips Suhail tighter. Then, all at once:

ALIA
There was a shimmer.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Noura lets go and falls back. She rises. Her eyes narrow.

NOURA
Shimmer in the rain...

She turns to her father. Behind him, a dense fog shimmers.
Her eyes open.

NOURA
Just like the pond.

She gasps.

NOURA
That's it! The dam!

She runs to her father and helps him up. He reorients himself.

NOURA
Less water flows through the
jungle.

Thaaban tilts his head.

NOURA
The rain must have lost its
shimmer!

Noura yanks on his hand, pulling him with her. The Elder sits weaving at the far end of the village. She looks up from her fabric. Noura and Thaaban stand above her. The Elder clicks her tongue.

NOURA
The fog isn't a curse,
Grandmother!

The Elder shakes her head and continues weaving.

ELDER
May the stars save your mind,
girl.

EXT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - FLOWER MEADOW HILL - DAY -
CONTINUOUS

Nayla is focused on the horizon. The New World army is arriving at the Buried City. Tarek is with Suhail.

TAREK
The incline in Serpent's Canyon.
The dried river in Climber's
Valley.

He turns to Alia.

TAREK
I-I think she's right.

Suhail turns between them.

SUHAIL
What must be done?

Nayla still watches the horizon. Tarek scratches his head.

TAREK
We break the Dam?

SUHAIL
NO!

Tarek and Alia jump. Nayla grips his hand. Suhail steps back, looking down.

SUHAIL
Sorry. I just.

He looks up at them.

SUHAIL
The dam guarantees southern
independence.

Nayla turns back to the horizon.

SUHAIL
It is saving so many lives.

Tarek steps close to him.

TAREK
Yes. But how many more would be
lost?

Suhail cannot hold his gaze.

SUHAIL
Breaking the dam today will not
summon the shimmering rain
tomorrow. And if we are wrong,
then...

Alia steps between them.

ALIA
The Messiah's right. To see one
star is not to know the sky.

Tarek nods.

TAREK
Then we test it.

Suhail's eyes return to Tarek's.

SUHAIL
The Warden's Chamber.

TAREK
What's that?

SUHAIL
It has been said that Sheikh
Aldebaran stole from our sacred
pond to save his dying wife. That
water still shimmers.

Alia and Tarek turn to each other.

SUHAIL
The NWI believe the late Warden
preserved it in his private
chamber.

Nayla squints into the distance.

NAYLA
He's here.

Coming in from behind the Buried City, a caravan marked by
the Branch. Sheikh Mishal's procession.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Ahead of Suhail, the black hole swells, larger than the Buried City itself. Wisps surge into it from every side. Behind him, around him, from across the city. Caught and pulled and swallowed. The ones not yet taken spin in slow rings around its edge. His own light tugs towards it. A hand on his shoulder. He blinks.

EXT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - FLOWER MEADOW HILL - DAY -
CONTINUOUS

Nayla.

NAYLA

What message should we send?

Suhail looks back at the valley below. Hundreds have made camp there. He shakes his head.

SUHAIL

I didn't ask them to come.

EXT. WARDEN'S PALACE - COURTYARD - DAY

Alia and Tarek enter. Blue flowers are dim along the courtyard's metal against the gold of day. At the back wall, near the throne, Rigel is swallowed by the crowd. A raised fist.

CITIZEN

We don't want the New World's
army!

Rigel looks across the crowd.

RIGEL

They are only here to protect us.

Behind them, Alia nudges Tarek.

ALIA

Fard.

Tarek glances, then quickly looks away. They thread through the crowd, avoiding Fard's eyesight. He is beside Rigel, addressing the crowd.

FARD

The Conqueror is gathering
hundreds beyond our walls. We
would be fools not to prepare.

The cries grow louder.

EXT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - FOLLOWERS' CAMP - DAY

FOLLOWERS
Open the gates!

Hundreds chant before Suhail. Individual voices cut through the chant. Suhail stands beside Nayla.

SUHAIL
This is not the way!

The valley below rumbles with voices.

SUHAIL
They are afraid of us!

His followers shout over each other.

FOLLOWER
Hoarders!

ANOTHER FOLLOWER
Thieves!

Suhail puts a hand up.

SUHAIL
No, we must show them peace!

EXT. WARDEN'S PALACE - COURTYARD - DAY

Rigel scans the crowd. They have gone quiet.

RIGEL
This will only be tempora—

The palace doors swing open. Everyone turns. A MESSENGER.

MESSENGER
Sheikh Altair has returned!

The court breaks into cheers. Fard's eyes linger on the open doors. Then he turns to Rigel.

FARD
You proved yourself a better
warden, cousin.

Rigel doesn't answer. People stream out the single door. The space empties. Fard presses Rigel's shoulder, then follows the court out. Rigel looks around the emptied space. Mirrored walls throw his reflection back at him from every side. He turns away from the door. Green light catches his eye. The titanium throne. His eyes try to trace the fine patterns. Each line folds back into another.

A hand grabs him. Tarek. His finger is over his lips.

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - HALL OF SULH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Alia stares at a painting of Sheikh Aldebaran, hung beside paintings of previous Sheikhs. Gifts from across Al-Lawha fill the room. Relics, vessels, weavings. Rigel steps in front of her.

RIGEL
What is it?

ALIA
Are you sure no one can hear us?

RIGEL
I don't have time for this.

TAREK
The Warden's Chamber.

Tarek steps between them. Rigel goes still.

TAREK
Have you seen it?

Rigel looks both ways.

RIGEL
How do you know about that?

Alia leans in.

ALIA
We don't have much time, Sheikh.

RIGEL
No.

Rigel shakes his head.

RIGEL
It would be dishonorable for
anyone but Altair to see it first.

Tarek grabs his hand.

TAREK

My Sheikh, please hear us. If what we believe to be in there is true, it may be the key to stopping this blight.

Rigel looks between them.

RIGEL

Why are you avoiding Fard?

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - ALTAIR'S BEDROOM - DAY

Altair presses Sada's pillow to his nose and inhales when Rigel walks in. He turns. Smiling. Rigel closes the door behind him. Altair stands. Slowly walks towards him. They meet each other's eyes. Rigel's breath shudders. They fall into each other's arms.

Soft. Behind Rigel's shoulder, Altair spots his oud leaning by the door. Its mandarin flower is still alive with light. Rigel pulls back. He wipes his eyes.

RIGEL

They say the blight may return.
But we have hope.

Altair is still smiling.

ALTAIR

I never doubted it.

Neither speaks. Altair notices Rigel shift.

ALTAIR

What is it?

Rigel glances at the door. Then back at Altair.

RIGEL

That hope lies in the Warden's
Chamber.

Altair's smile twitches. He steps back, falling into the bed. Rigel pulls the Warden's Key from beneath his robes. Extends it to Altair.

RIGEL

Welcome back, Warden.

INT. WORLD RESERVE - CONTROL PLATFORM - DAY

Altair stands within the platform's low titanium walls. Darkness drops below. Pallets of supplies cross above and below him in all directions, trailing green light.

He pulls out the Warden's Key. Looks at it, then at the ancient console before him. He slides the key across it in long, deliberate strokes. A leaf etched onto a dial glows green. Altair turns it. The platform falls. Altair lurches into the console. He grabs the railing as his robes flap against the roaring air. Below, only darkness.

The platform is plummeting down a deep circular well. Chambers line its walls. From each one, pallets surge upwards, green light trailing behind them. They weave around the falling platform, never quite touching it. The platform slows. Stops.

INT. WORLD RESERVE - WARDEN'S CHAMBER - ENTRANCE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Green laser light parts the titanium rails. A bridge unfolds towards a single cell. There are no pallets zipping this far down. Altair stares at its iridescent wall. On it, a symbol glows faint green. A leaf. Altair walks towards it. The wall fades as he approaches. Altair stops. His breath catches.

INT. WORLD RESERVE - WARDEN'S CHAMBER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Within the small room's mirrored walls, a woman lies on bare metal. Unconscious. Pregnant. She reflects infinitely.

ALTAIR

Mother?

Altair runs to SHEIKHA SOHA. He turns her face towards him. Her head comes with his hand. The original face stays where it was. Altair falls back. His mother lies with a second head extending from her own. One face towards him, the other still staring upwards. He pulls on her hand. Drags her body until two of her lie in the chamber.

The one in his arms moves.

ALTAIR

Mama?

Infinite Altairs reflect over infinite Sohas. Her eyes flutter. Then they open. Altair smiles over her. Her eyes meet his.

SOHA
Who are you? Where's Aldebaran?

She looks around. Sees her other body.

SOHA
How many times has it been?

Soha's face tightens. She screams in Altair's arms. Altair notices movement under her pregnant belly. It bulges.

ALTAIR
What's wrong?

Her eyes snap back to Altair.

SOHA
Listen to me, boy!

She grabs Altair's arm. Sits up, eyes held on her preserved body.

SOHA
You must kill me.

She screams louder. Her hands fling to her belly. Altair holds her. He begins to hum a familiar melody. The Melody of Warmth. Soha's eyes refocus on the boy above her. They go wide.

SOHA
Altair?

Altair's smile has never been warmer.

ALTAIR
Yes, Mama. It's me.

Her eyes flood. She swallows Altair under her arms. They hold each other a thousand times across the mirrored walls. Soha pulls back. Her smile is even warmer.

SOHA
You look just like him.

Altair lifts her gently. Soha screams, falling onto his shoulder.

SOHA
Leave me.

Her thumb finds Altair's face.

ALTAIR
Never! We can still save you!

She smiles at him. He presses his face into her palm.

SOHA
I am already with the stars.

ALTAIR
But the New World docto—
Soha's eyes squeeze shut. Her face clenches.

ALTAIR
Mama...
Altair presses his forehead to hers.

ALTAIR
Please...
She exhales as her face softens.

SOHA
You were worth it.
Altair holds her body as it goes limp in his arms. They reflect to infinity.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Mishal. Deneb. NASHIRA. SAIF. Jady. Five Sheikhs on one platform. Behind them, the titanium walls of the Buried City rise into the sky.

Sheikh Altair approaches the platform. Rigel cuts in front of him. Holds his eyes. Altair smiles. He walks past Rigel and onto the platform. Stands beside Mishal. A voice behind him.

FARD (O.S.)
Hey.
Altair turns. His smile widens.

ALTAIR
Fard!
Fard's eyes waver. Altair leaps into an embrace. Fard finds himself holding Altair tighter.

FARD
How is Tamtoom? Did you treat him
well?

Altair chuckles, pulling back.

ALTAIR
He likes me better than you now.

Altair takes Fard's hand and pulls him closer, putting an arm around his shoulder.

ALTAIR
It's good to see you, my friend.

A holstered dagger glints on Fard's waist.

FARD
Yeah.

They look across the horizon. Suhail is marching forward with his followers.

Behind the Sheikhs, a makeshift army of palace guards and volunteers stands in blocks alongside the New World army.

Rigel, below the platform, turns between the approaching army and Altair above him. Then to Fard beside him. And runs off. Jady turns to the Sheikhs.

JADY
Suhail is only here to talk.

The approaching army marches closer. Nashira crosses her arms.

NASHIRA
You better be right, boy.

Altair turns to them.

ALTAIR
I can feel panic beneath our
people's breath.

Behind them, men and women wait. Spears and daggers and vine whips. Eyes on the approaching army. One of them holds a flowered flamethrower. The farmer. Altair breathes.

ALTAIR
We must stay calm.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED VILLAGE - DAY

The Caretakers outnumber the Seers. They turn towards the Elder. Her arms are out, blocking Thaaban and Noura.

ELDER
No! Never again!

Noura holds the Elder's gaze.

NOURA
The world needs us, Grandmother.

ELDER
I said no, child!

Noura groans and ducks under the Elder's arms. She looks back at Thaaban. He is looking at his mother. The Elder is begging on her knees.

NOURA
Come on, Baba!

Thaaban turns away from his mother. To his daughter.

EXT. BURIED CITY - FLOWER FARMS - DAY

Suhail marches through the blue flowerlight of the farms, his followers behind him. Beneath their feet, flowers begin to flicker.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Fard's hand hovers over the dagger on his waist. The Sheikhs do not look away from Suhail. The Buried City gates are silent. Except for breath.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - FOG - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Noura runs through leaves, ducking between vines. She jumps over a fallen branch. Thick shimmering fog swallows every path before her.

NOURA (V.O.)
The world will know me as the
greatest scholar alive!

On her face, pure determination. Thaaban runs behind her. Falling further with each step.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail and his followers pass through the farms. Onto the road to the gates.

INTERCUT - THE VOICE / ROAD TO THE GATES

IN THE VOICE

The black hole waits. Wisps of light pull towards it from every direction.

WITH SUHAIL

Suhail stops. His hands fling to cover his eyes. He squints through his fingers. The platform burns white. He strains, unable to take another step. Nayla holds his hand.

NAYLA

You can do it.

Suhail turns towards her. Through the light, her form becomes clear. He nods. Turns back. Inside the brightness, one figure remains dark. Shadowed.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Deneb turns to Saif.

DENEB

What is he doing?

Saif lets out a short laugh.

SAIF

Looks like we scared the Messiah off.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail takes a step. His eyes on the shadow.

VISION - NEW WORLD - FARD AND MENKAR

A flash. Menkar, looking both ways.

MENKAR

Are you sure he can't see us?

Fard nods.

FARD
We're as invisible to him as I was
to Altair.

INTERCUT - ROAD TO THE GATES / PLATFORM

Suhail gasps. On the platform, Altair gasps. The same breath, in two places. Altair looks at Fard. Then to where Rigel was. Empty. Suhail can't move.

Nayla takes his arm across her shoulder. On her face, pure determination.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - FOG - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Noura runs blind. The fog is so dense she cannot see her own hands.

ALTAIR (V.O.)
I felt it for them, Noura. All of
them. Suffocating.

She stumbles. Thaaban catches her.

INTERCUT - ROAD TO THE GATES / THE VOICE

Nayla carries Suhail forward. He can't see anything ahead of him. Just white. She takes the next step.

IN THE VOICE

Wisps tear out of Suhail and surge towards the black hole.

WITH SUHAIL AND NAYLA

Another step. Suhail groans. His knees buckle. His head drops.

Nayla drags him forward.

IN THE VOICE

More strands pour out of Suhail into the black hole. Suhail reaches towards the light. His eyes catch on the shadow. It is dissolving. Ink in water.

INT. NEW WORLD - BARRACKS - VISION

A flash. Fard, looking at his feet.

FARD
What if we're wrong?

Menkar lifts his chin up.

MENKAR
By merit, we advance.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail staggers.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY

Ahead of Noura and Thaaban, the Anqa bathes in the Sacred Pond. Canopy gold refracts over its feathers. Noura hears the Obelisk's hum. She takes a step towards it. The Elder steps in front of her.

INTERCUT - ROAD TO THE GATES / THE VOICE / ALTAIR'S MEMORIES

Suhail drives forward into the light. The black hole's edges push back, denser the harder he pushes. He grunts. Sand kicks behind his feet. His hair whips. Arms outstretched. The black hole curves inwards. Then inverts. Streams surge out of its center and back into Suhail.

MEMORY - YOUNG ALTAIR AND SADA

Young Altair is a dot on the horizon. SADA takes a step as his foot fades. Snaps his foot back in.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail croaks, falling to his knees. Nayla drops beside him.

REELA (V.O.)
Hope you aren't filling his head
with too many of your wild ideas.

He reaches towards her.

SUHAIL
Reela?

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Altair watches Suhail.

ALTAIR

Is he OK?

A small Nayla is helping him up. Still far away, Suhail takes another step. Altair lurches back. Mishal catches him.

MISHAL

Warden?

The other Sheikhs crowd around him. Fard grips his dagger. Altair stands up. Blinks. Looks around. Looks ahead. Suhail. Altair rubs his eyes. The figure flickers.

Sada.

EXT. FLOWER MEADOW - VISION

A young Altair is giggling, chasing Sada down the flower meadow.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail's breath stops. Through the blinding light, Altair's form takes shape. Suhail's eyes go wide.

SUHAIL

A-Altair?

He takes a step.

EXT. BURIED CITY TRAIL - VISION

Sada holds onto Altair's back. They're riding SABRA down the Buried City trail.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail runs.

SUHAIL

Altair! It's me!

EXT. BURIED CITY OUTSKIRTS - MAIN ROAD - NIGHT - VISION

Sada dances in a crowd as Altair plays his oud and Noura plays her drums onstage. In the moment. Uncaring.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

ALTAIR

Sada!

Altair is about to run for him. Mishal grabs his shoulder.

MISHAL

Sada's gone, son.

The Sheikhs turn between each other. Altair's eyes are locked on Sada. His friend is running towards him. Nayla chases Suhail as he runs towards Altair. Along the horizon behind them, the followers stop their march, turning to each other. Fard unsheathes his dagger. Altair turns.

Fard stands with the dagger raised.

FARD

W-What's happening to me?

The Sheikhs turn. Hands to their holsters.

INTERCUT - THE VOICE / ROAD TO THE GATES

Through the darkness inside Altair's light, Suhail sees Fard.

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - ALDEBARAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - VISION

Fard enters. Aldebaran sleeps. Fard reaches for the Warden's Key around his neck. Across the hall, Altair.

ALTAIR

Sada? Is that you?

He runs to Aldebaran's room. Peeks in. Fard, holding the key. He sees Altair at the door. Altair sees past him. Turns away.

INT. WORLD RESERVE - NIGHT - VISION

Fard watches Altair suffocating in the World Reserve. The Warden's Key drops as Fard's hand flies to his mouth.

MENKAR (V.O.)
Then, how did you survive?

INT. NEW WORLD - PADDED ROOM - VISION

Arms crossed, Menkar stands over a seated Fard. Other NWI soldiers fill the small room. Jassim is among them. He turns to Fard.

JASSIM
The Reserve's air is insulated. It must have protected your breath.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Altair's eyes waver. His voice cracks.

ALTAIR
Fard?

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY

The Elder holds her arms out. Her eyes are swollen.

ELDER
Please, Noura.

She presses her head to the soil.

ELDER
I can't lose you too.

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail screams. Then laughs. Then moans. His face moves from emotion to emotion as he runs through the blinding light.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Over Altair, the dagger glints.

ALTAIR (V.O.)
No one will suffer under my ward!

Fard pretends to resist the dagger in his hands.

FARD
The Conqueror!

He presses it to Altair's neck.

FARD
He's controlling me!

EXT. BURIED CITY - ROAD TO THE GATES - DAY

Suhail leaps.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY

Noura's eyes are on the Obelisk behind her begging grandmother.

NOURA
I'm sorry.

She runs around her. Towards it.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - ARMIES - DAY

WITH SUHAIL'S FOLLOWERS

Their Messiah charges towards the Warden.

WITH FAY

Within the New World army, Fay watches Fard strain against the dagger pressed to the Warden's neck.

ALTAIR'S POV

Sada. His best friend. Running towards him.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY

Noura touches the Obelisk. Her eyes shut.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The wisps are braided into two ropes. They lash against each other, flickering, blinding bright where they collide.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Sheikh Mishal pulls Altair back, thrusting Fard's arm away from his neck. The dagger nicks Altair's skin. Nayla stands at the head of Suhail's followers. She sees her husband tackle Fard. Altair sees Sada snatch Fard's dagger. Sada kicks Fard's legs from under him, knocking him onto his back. He jumps onto Fard's stomach, rage burning in his eyes. Sada stabs Fard.

Again. And again. Fay sees the Conqueror stabbing her superior. She grips her vine whip. Suhail's followers charge, weaponless, from behind Nayla. Nayla turns to them, her arms raised.

NAYLA

Hold back!

They run past her. Altair sees Sada. Blood splattered on his face. Dagger in his hand. Over Fard's dead body. Sada looks up from the body. And meets Altair's eyes.

He is terrified. He leaps towards the boy as Suhail's followers and the united armies of the Free Tribes and New World collide around them.

INTERCUT - THE VOICE / GATES / SUHAIL'S MEMORIES

IN THE VOICE

Sada's darkness pushes against Altair like a repelling magnet. Altair fights it, a thousand screams blasting at him like a hurricane.

MEMORY FLASHES - SUHAIL

Sada confronting the Elder. Hair blowing.

Sada running with the boys around the Sacred Pond.

IN THE VOICE

Almost there.

MEMORY FLASH - THE FARMHOUSE

Sada seeing Adel and Faisal hanging through the farmhouse window.

MEMORY FLASH - THE FLOWER MEADOW

Face to face. Sada embracing Altair in the flower meadow the night they met, announcing their fraternity to the stars. Warm.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

The bloody dagger drops from Sada's hand. Altair is frozen in place just ahead of him.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Wisps of light pour out of Suhail and into Altair.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

A follower climbs the platform. He charges at Altair, bare hand curled into a fist. Mishal turns with his dagger. The follower falls into it.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

Altair's black hole grows larger as it swallows more of Suhail's light.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

A follower kicks one of the Free Tribes' men and snatches his makeshift spear. He runs with it towards the platform. Deneb steps into the path. The spear drives into him. Saif thrusts his dagger into the follower and shoves him off the platform. Jady drops beside Deneb, pressing both hands to the wound.

Nashira whirls towards another body clawing up the platform's edge. Her dagger flashes. The climber falls back into the chaos. Mishal stands over Altair. Saif takes the right. Nashira the left. Jady, one hand red with Deneb's blood, reaches for his own dagger.

INT. THE VOICE - BLACK VOID

The black hole collapses into a shape. Altair. Then explodes outwards. The void becomes light.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - BATTLEFIELD - DAY

A vine whip cracks across a follower's chest. The follower drops. Two more followers tackle the soldier holding it. A man swings a makeshift spear into the crowd. His eyes meet the woman's at the end of his spear. He freezes. Bodies collide around them.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY

Noura's eyes are scrunched, tears streaming down her face.

NOURA
They're fighting each other, Baba!

Thaaban can't respond. His jaw trembles. Sweat running down his face.

NOURA
I don't know what to do.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Fay cracks her whip. She electrocutes follower after follower. Nearby, the farmer holds the flamethrower to his eye. Points it from place to place, unable to distinguish bodies through the chaos. A follower turns to him. The farmer's finger hovers over the trigger. The follower leaps. The farmer pulls the trigger.

His eyes reflect a cloud of fire. Three men burn alive in front of him. More followers swarm around him. They steal the flamethrower. The Sheikhs form a circle around Altair. Mishal. Saif. Nashira. Jady. Deneb bleeding behind them.

A follower runs towards an opening, spear in hand. Altair's back is just ahead of its point. Mishal jumps in front of it. The sky thunders with the sound of drums.

NOURA (V.O.)
STOP!

Noura's voice echoes through everyone.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - DAY

Noura is over the Obelisk. She is drumming it.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - BATTLEFIELD - DAY

For one breath, hands still on their weapons. Tired faces look up to where the sound came from. There is nothing but sky. The word fades as quickly as it came. Only the drums remain. They look to the platform where the Sheikhs are huddled. The Sheikhs part.

On the platform between them: The Conqueror. The Voice of the Stars. Sada. Clinging to the Warden's shoulder. Sobbing. Soaked in blood.

The battlefield is still. The Sheikhs turn towards them. Altair's arms are wrapped around Sada.

ALTAIR
I accept your burden.

He holds him tighter.

ALTAIR
Please.

Tighter.

ALTAIR
Live.

Under Altair's embrace, Sada fades until all that's left is Suhail, wailing in Altair's arms. Suhail pulls back. Altair's eyes see past him. Suhail looks at his bloodied hands. They are trembling. He leaps back onto Altair.

SUHAIL
Altair!

He strokes his hair. Hums the Melody of Warmth. Saif tends Deneb's wound. Jady tears cloth from his own robe and presses it over Saif's hands. Nashira stands over them, dagger low, eyes searching for the next threat. Fay helps a soldier to his feet. Followers check on each other.

Mishal yanks Suhail away from Altair. He roars.

MISHAL
What have you done?

Altair's smile is gone. Mishal shoves Suhail off the platform and crouches down to Altair's faded eyes.

MISHAL
Son!

He taps his face.

MISHAL
Hear my voice!

Suhail steadies himself. Climbs back onto the platform.
Crouches beside Mishal. He holds Altair's hand.

SUHAIL
It's OK. You're OK.

Mishal's glare cuts to Suhail. Suhail nods. Together, they lift Altair to his feet. The Sheikhs turn to him. The battlefield below turns to the platform. Altair's face is empty. No smile.

A hand grabs his shoulder. Rigel. Altair's flowered oud is saddled behind his back. Altair turns to him. Slowly. Eyes faded. Rigel swings the oud out and extends it to Altair.

Altair looks at the oud in Rigel's hand.

BEGIN MONTAGE - OFFERED HANDS

ACROSS AL-LAWHA

Hand after hand, offered across Al-Lawha.

ALTAIR

Altair's eyes waver. His hand lifts.

ACROSS AL-LAWHA

Reaching hands lift with his.

END MONTAGE

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Altair grabs the oud. The battlefield is quiet.

The air is somber. Altair turns to face them. Oud in hand. Fard's bloodied body by his feet. He attempts to play a note. Falters. Attempts another.

His pluck is so weak it is barely audible. Suhail takes out his flute. Over the bloody battlefield, Suhail plays the first note. Altair plucks. Another note. Altair's fingers fail him. Suhail lifts the flute from his mouth.

He looks at his childhood friend. Gone.

SUHAIL

Altair?

INTERCUT - BURIED CITY GATES / SACRED POND

A drum beats from the sky. Altair looks up.

Noura stands where his gaze lands. She smirks.

Slowly. Altair smirks back.

He strums.

Noura drums.

Ethereal synth plucks decorate the cold air. Structureless and transient.

Noura gives them shape.

But Altair's notes are tinged with sadness. With longing. He reveals more of the Melody of Longing before the onlooking crowd.

They watch with heavy eyes. Suhail puts the flute back on his lips. A note between Altair's notes. The warmth within the longing. But they're off. Dissonant against Altair's oud. Noura's drums multiply.

Two rhythms on top of each other. A pattern between the two melodies. Noura is drumming a complex polyrhythm on the Obelisk. Onto Al-Lawha itself. The Anqa dances, entranced behind her. Note by note, Suhail's flute and Altair's oud braid through Noura's drums.

They weave. Eyes across the battlefield begin to well. Weapons drop onto the metallic sands. Playing as one, Altair, Noura, and Suhail recover the Ballad of the Forgotten. Sheikha Nashira's weary eyes melt into awe. Saif lowers his dagger. Jady looks down at Deneb, still breathing beneath his hands.

Those who can stand rise from their fallen comrades. They turn towards the music. Breaths ease across the battlefield.

EXT. BURIED CITY - GATES - PLATFORM - DAY

Altair stops. He looks out across all the fallen bodies. Altair turns. Sees Rigel's eyes. His breath catches.

A thud.

Rigel looks down. Altair is clinging to him, cheek pressed against his chest. He holds Altair tighter. The Sheikhs watch in silence. The Warden Who Would Not Weep finally weeps under Rigel's embrace.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BURIED CITY - FORMER FLOWER MEADOW - NIGHT

There are no more flowers. Only Altair and Suhail, lying on the grass, stargazing. Suhail sits up. On the horizon, Aireth is rising. Two moons in precise alignment. He turns to Altair, washed blue by the massive planet.

SUHAIL
Happy birthyear, my friend.

Altair's eyes see past him.

MEMORY - ALTAIR AND FARD

Fard tackles Altair, rolling over him, squeezing him tight.

EXT. BURIED CITY - FORMER FLOWER MEADOW - NIGHT

SUHAIL
Altair?

Altair blinks. He sits up with a smile. Aireth sets before them. Suhail stands. He holds a hand out.

SUHAIL
Come on, we're going to miss the
Turning.

EXT. BURIED CITY TRAIL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Suhail soars on THOUM. Close behind Altair on TAMR.

SUHAIL
Race you there!

Thoum launches. They shoot past Altair along the metallic trail. Altair barely smiles. Pats Tamr, greying now. Tamr launches into a gentle stroll. Looks up at Altair with an apologetic glance. Altair gives him a good scruff.

ALTAIR
It's OK, boy. You're doing great.

Suhail is approaching the Buried City gates ahead, filled with flowerlight and festivities.

EXT. BURIED CITY - WORLD RESERVE DEPOSIT CONSOLE - NIGHT -
THE TURNING

The colossal titanium cube of the World Reserve's deposit console reflects back the eyes of Al-Lawha. On an elevated platform before it, the Sheikhs stand. Deneb stands beside Mishal, their bandages strapped opposite each other. Saif and Nashira share a laugh, then shake hands. Jady, Layla, and Haider are facing each other. Altair approaches with Suhail. Layla meets Suhail's eyes.

He falls into her embrace. Suhail pulls back, searching her face.

SUHAIL
I don't know how you did it.

Sheikha Layla chuckles softly.

LAYLA
That is the burden of leadership,
my child. Making choices without
hearing every voice.

She glances at the Sheikhs, then back to him with smug eyes.

LAYLA
Feeding your followers is not so
easy, now, is it?

Haider steals Suhail for a hug.

HAIDER
I missed you, boy.

Suhail smiles.

SUHAIL
Yeah, me too.

Within the watching crowd, Farasha stands next to Doub. Holding Doub's hand is a woman with grey eyes. She is carrying a baby. Altair takes the flowered microphone.

ALTAIR
Honored brothers and sisters...

Hushes spread through the crowd.

ALTAIR

First, I offer my gratitude. To
each tribe, each hand, and each
heart, for guiding us through this
eventful cycle...

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - GUEST ROOM DOORWAY

Noura drums a titanium door. It opens. Blue light seeps from within.

NOURA

Is she here?

Behind Noura, Thaaban is trying to peek through the door. Suhail opens the door wider.

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thaaban steps in. Behind Suhail, Rudaina. Thaaban runs. Stops right before her. Sees himself in her eyes. Just one breath away.

Takes her hand. Kisses it. His body gives. He collapses onto his knees. Rudaina kneels. Kisses his forehead. Strokes his hair. He leans in to hold her. Rudaina submits, falling into his open arms, eyes shut over his shoulder as tears flood down both their faces.

Suhail puts an arm around Noura. Noura leans against him. They watch until their parents rise.

NOURA

Oh, I almost forgot.

Noura pats one of her pockets. She steps back from Suhail, her hand extended.

NOURA

From Grandmother.

A vial of shimmering water.

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - HALL OF SULH

The Sheikhs stand around the map of Al-Lawha. Rigel stands behind Sheikh Mishal. Suhail and Noura behind Sheikh Altair. Altair's eyes are elsewhere. Suhail puts a hand on his shoulder. His eyes flicker back. He looks behind at Noura. She nods. To the Sheikhs:

ALTAIR
With the shimmering water now
preserved, we must decide on the
dam.

Altair turns to Noura. He smiles.

ALTAIR
Scholar, what do you suggest?

Everyone turns to Noura. Noura stares at the Council of
Sheikhs. Steps up.

NOURA
It is not just the dam, Warden.
It's your flower farms too.

The Sheikhs murmur over each other.

NOURA
With more Warden's Bloom than
water, they fight for breath.

Nashira clicks her tongue.

NASHIRA
I knew it.

Altair shuts his eyes. The voices of arguing Sheikhs become
a dull white noise until his eyes open. They are all staring
at him.

ALTAIR
Your voices are heard. The Buried
City will stop the farms until
this phenomenon is better
understood.

He looks at Noura.

ALTAIR
Would you lead the research team,
Noura?

Noura is already nodding. Composes herself.

NOURA
Yes, I would.

Altair turns back to the council.

ALTAIR
And what of the dam?

Mishal watches Altair, his eyes bright with pride. Rigel catches the look. Sheikha Layla turns to Sheikh Jady.

LAYLA
With your permission, my Sheikh,
we would like to keep the dam.

The Sheikhs all turn to Jady. His fists clench. He breathes. They unclench.

JADY
We have learned to climb lower,
Sheikha.

He turns between the Sheikhs.

JADY
But I will have to pass it by my
people.

Sheikha Layla nods.

LAYLA
That is fair.

The Sheikhs are quiet over the map in front of them. Mishal looks around.

MISHAL
Anything else?

Sheikh Haider steps up.

HAIDER
Suhail.

The Sheikhs turn to Haider, whose eyes hold Suhail's.

SUHAIL
Yes, my Sheikh?

HAIDER
People still call on your name.

Haider to the Sheikhs:

HAIDER
The conditions for a new tribe
have come. As they once did for
each of our ancestors.

The Sheikhs turn to Suhail.

HAIDER
Would you accept their call?

Haider extends his hand.

HAIDER
As Sheikh of the Greenlands.

Noura squeals, then covers her mouth. Suhail doesn't speak. He glances around the room. Haider's hand hangs between them.

SUHAIL
With honor and pride.

Suhail shakes it. The council's voices join together.

COUNCIL
With honor and pride!

Altair turns to Sheikh Suhail and shakes his hand.

ALTAIR
The Greenlands are yours to carry,
Sheikh.

There is an ache behind his smile. The other Sheikhs line up in front of Suhail. One by one, they shake his hand. As Jady passes, he notices Altair looking down.

JADY
Something on your mind, Warden?

Altair lifts his head towards Jady, eyes faded. He finds Jady through the noise.

ALTAIR
This voice...

He glances at Suhail.

ALTAIR
It blinds me.

Mishal turns to them.

MISHAL
What are you saying, son?

The whole room hears him. They turn. Altair looks between all their eyes.

ALTAIR
I must abandon my post as Warden.

The Sheikhs gasp. Saif's lips curl with disgust.

SAIF
Traitor.

Mishal hisses at Saif. Nashira cuts between them.

NASHIRA
Let him speak.

Altair steadies as he looks at Rigel.

ALTAIR
If the council would agree, I
nominate Rigel to take my place.

Rigel's eyes go wide. He steps back.

RIGEL
No...I can't—

ALTAIR
But you did.

Altair walks towards him.

ALTAIR
If we do not choose for ourselves,
another Cursed Warden will come.

Altair pulls the Warden's Key from his robes. He extends it to Rigel before the Sheikhs.

ALTAIR
It is time for a new way.

The Sheikhs are looking between each other.

ALTAIR
This is not a gift, Rigel. It is a
burden.

Rigel holds Altair's eyes.

INT. WORLD RESERVE - CONTROL CONSOLE - NIGHT - MEMORY

Rigel watches Altair, Fard, and Noura laughing together. Altair turns to him with the warmest smile in Al-Lawha. Rigel is puzzled.

ALTAIR
Rigel, come join us!

INT. WARDEN'S PALACE - HALL OF SULH

Rigel's eyes are welling. Altair's too. The Warden's Key drops. A moment. Then. Rigel embraces Altair. Suhail puts a hand on Noura's shoulder. The Sheikhs find themselves smiling.

Mishal has the proudest grin on his face. Rigel pulls back, wipes his eyes, and picks up the Warden's Key. Looks at it. At Altair. The Recovered Ballad echoes.

RIGEL

And what would you do, brother?

Altair smiles with warmth and longing.

ALTAIR

Where I am needed, I will be present.

EXT. METALLIC DESERT - DUNE

A foot presses into metallic sand. Against the rising ringed planet, Altair leads Tamr up a dune, the mandarin oud slung behind his back. Footprints trail behind them. Step.

EXT. AL-LAWHA - NORTHERN EDGE - VISION

Menkar on a plank before a booing crowd. It extends out Al-Lawha's northern edge. A sea of clouds ahead. He steps off.

EXT. METALLIC DESERT - DUNE

Altair winces, falling onto Tamr.

ALTAIR

Sorry, boy.

He gives Tamr a good scruff. Another step.

EXT. SHIMMERING JUNGLE - SACRED POND - VISION

Noura pulls Tarek's hand towards the Anqa sipping from the Sacred Pond. The Anqa snaps its beak at them, jolting them back. They giggle.

EXT. METALLIC DESERT - DUNE

Altair giggles with them as he crawls up the dune with Tamr. Behind them, wind sweeps their footprints clean. Step.

VISION - CARAVAN CAMPFIRE

BALQAM sits with a caravan of new faces, laughing around a campfire.

EXT. METALLIC DESERT - DUNE

Altair's hands open as he reaches the dune's top. Across the horizon, endless sand. Something catches Altair's eyes. A single blue speck. Warden's Bloom, almost imperceptible within the sand around it. A single tear forms under Altair's eye. Altair breathes in. Beneath his breath, breaths from across Al-Lawha. He breathes out. A thousand breaths in one exhale.

Altair wipes his eyes. Tamr folds down to him. Altair climbs on. Ahead, the dune falls into the horizon. Tamr jolts. The slope gets steeper. Faster. Wind whipping through Altair's hair. Altair lifts his hands off the reins. Raises his arms up. Higher. His robes flapping. A smile stretching wider than it ever has.

ALTAIR
Wooooohooooooooo!

CUT TO:

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "END OF TABLET"

FADE TO BLACK.

BEGIN END CREDITS

MID-CREDITS SEQUENCE

INSERT - A SLAB OF IRIDESCENT METAL

Etched onto it: "COLOPHON - ON THE TABLETS OF THE BEDOUIN"

EXT. AL-LAWHA - OUTER WALL

Wrinkled hands hammer a stake into stone. Thread rope through it. Tug. The hitch holds. Shahid drops. Al-Lawha's face, purple with moss, rushes past him. A sharp stop. Shahid crashes into the stone wall, bounces off it. He dangles. The rope taut. A pack slung around his shoulder. He reaches into it and pulls out another stake.

Hitch after hitch, Shahid drops down Al-Lawha. Metal glints from inside his pack. The old man mumbles to himself as he climbs.

SHAHID

I knew it.

Another stake.

SHAHID

No one would believe me.

Another. Below him, Al-Lawha reflects back. Water surrounds it as far as the horizon.

SHAHID

Look who's laughing now.

EXT. WORLD BELOW - SHALLOW WATER

His feet touch the water. They do not sink. It's shallow. Shahid's wrinkled eyes go as wide as they can. He looks around. Delirious. Giggles. An Obelisk hovers over a shimmer in the distance. Shahid listens. Altair's oud. Noura's drums. Suhail's flute. The Ballad of the Forgotten echoes from within it. From within the Voice.

He steps over corroded metal. Ruins. Towards the shimmer. Towards the warmth. Shahid faces the Obelisk. Reaches. Touches it. There is no void. Only light. And a warm melody.

Shahid lets go. The Ballad aches from somewhere else. He turns towards it.

EXT. WORLD BELOW - CORAL FOREST

Pink chutes, alive like branches, mirror across the horizon. A forest of corals. Each white spire larger than any trunk in the Sprawling Woods. Shahid steps over silver slugs. They crawl through the shallow water, disappearing into its surface. Another Obelisk is ahead of him. He listens for Altair's oud. Touches it.

VISION - NETWORK OF OBELISKS

The Ballad resonates between the Obelisks.

BACK WITH SHAHID

He turns towards the next.

EXT. WORLD BELOW - MOUNTAIN

Shahid hikes upwards. Cave after cave. Inside all of them, metallic tools. Chairs. Beds. Traces of other lives. He touches another Obelisk. Turns another direction.

EXT. WORLD BELOW - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Shahid warms himself over a campfire. Alone under the starry night. He reaches into his pack. Inside it. Three tablets. Metal.

ON THE TABLET: Of the Warden Who Would Not Weep.

ON THE TABLET: Of the Scholar Who Would Submit.

ON THE TABLET: Of the Seer Who Would Not See.

He moves them aside and grabs a handful of nuts.

BEGIN MONTAGE - WORLD AFTER WORLD

Shahid touches an Obelisk. Finds another world. Another Obelisk. Another world. World after world below Al-Lawha. Each Obelisk showing him the next. New life. New color.

END MONTAGE

EXT. WORLD BELOW - SPACESHIP

Shahid stops. A city-sized vessel is perfectly reflected over shallow water. A circle of Obelisks hovers around it. The shimmer in the water is so concentrated, the air itself is iridescent. Next to the spaceship, a colossal titanium cube waits. Larger than the vessel itself. Shahid approaches the ship. A Leaf emblem on its back. As he gets closer, a flush door seeps faint green.

Then slides open. By the door, light shaped as letters flashes.

ON THE DISPLAY: LEAKAGE WARNING:

ON THE DISPLAY: ENVIRONMENT CONTAMINATED

INT. SPACESHIP - GLASS CHAMBERS

Lining the massive walls of the ship, hundreds of thousands of cylindrical glass chambers. Light beneath each reads unfamiliar names. Beside him, the Ballad is louder than it has ever been. The warmth is deafening. He follows it to its source. A block of Titanium Damascus with veins that blink faint green. On it, a dial marked by the Leaf. He turns it. An alarm rings.

Shahid jolts back. Next to the dial, light morphs.

ON THE DISPLAY: SERVER BACKUP INITIATED.

His eyes roll up. He shakes violently.

ON THE DISPLAY: EXTRACTING NEURAL MAPS.

BEGIN MONTAGE - ACROSS AL-LAWHA

Across Al-Lawha, eyes roll up. Bodies shake. The shaking doesn't stop.

END MONTAGE

INT. SPACESHIP - GLASS CHAMBERS

Shahid's pack drops. The three tablets spill out of it. The text flickers.

ON THE DISPLAY: PRESERVING: 1,000,000 COPIES.

He stills. The names beneath the glass chambers refresh. Among them: Altair, Noura, Suhail.

EXT. WORLD BELOW - SPACESHIP - REPLICATION MONOLITH

Shahid runs out of the ship. His jaw drops. Green laser light parts the colossal monolith open. Inside it. Another vessel. Identical to the original. Reflecting infinitely within its mirrored walls.

Shahid approaches the duplicated ship. Flush metal seeps green and slides open. He peeks.

THROUGH THE DUPLICATED SHIP'S DOOR

The glass chambers across its walls contain copies of every living person on Al-Lawha. And scattered on the floor, the three metal tablets.

WITH SHAHID

The ship lifts. Shahid stumbles back. The vessel hovers over him, casting him in shadow. It turns, trailing green light. Then launches into the sky. Leaving the original intact.

Another vessel turns from the original and shoots into the sky. Then another. And another. Shahid falls back into the water. He counts the departing ships aloud. Loses his place.

EXT. AL-LAWHA - FLOWER MEADOW

Altair blinks. His wrinkled eyes widen. His face carved deeper where his half-smile held. A paintbrush hesitates in his hand. In front of him, a canvas. On it: a young Fard and Altair, lying on the meadow grass, eyes full of wonder.

Altair lifts his eyes from the canvas. Then.

He turns to you – directly into the camera. And smiles at you with immense empathy.

CONTINUOUS PULLBACK - MEADOW / AL-LAWHA / PLANET / STARS

You soar into the sky. Altair is a dot within a sea of flowers. Further back. Al-Lawha within a sea of clouds. Even further. A planet within a sea of stars. The stars smear forwards into lines.

Faster.

Faster.

You stop.

On a canvas of stars.

Indistinguishable from where we started.

FADE OUT.

END CREDITS RESUME.