

The valley in the shadowed lands remained quiet, slumbering between the two seas. It was quiet even after the fall of the Wight, after the eruption of Mount Gigan, and remained almost silent after the cataclysm of the last Giants. The dark mountains cast their shadows that stretched almost the entirety of the great valley. No water graced this barren place, not in hundreds of years; and what little rainfall managed to sneak through the thorny mountain-spires collected into puddles of salty ironwater in bowls at the feet of the great rocks. Thousands of miles of empty stole any chance the huge basin had for life.

Kale stood at the edge of the isthmus at the last of the magnolia groves before the cliff-side, and marveled at it. Mere glimpses of the bright sea were caught between the saw-blade mountaintops of the north curve of the valley, while the purple waters of the south trade-sea were almost invisible behind the orange-tipped mountains. He took out his bound-cloth and flipped through the pages, searching for an untouched leaf of dried skin. Taking the charcoal from his pack, he hurriedly sketched the outline of the mountain range on the lambskin. He only stood up momentarily to pluck a magnolia bud from a branch; disturbing a fenraven from his perch. The white bird danced and sailed through the air toward the sunlit mountains Kale was carefully attempting to recreate on his pad. The orange petals smeared its pollen across the individual peaks on his page. He glanced briefly to check the depth of the range's scale before he darkened the sky with the side of his charcoal piece to match the grey weather above. He dropped the bound-cloth in his lap, and beamed at the sunrise he mimicked in his sketch. Seeing the raven's dance in the clouds, he remembered the chalk he had stashed in his pack; immortalizing the bird with a couple light white ticks in his sky. But the bird was gone now.

He knew of the ruins that lay in the precipices of the mountainpeaks, although he had never seen them; a huge bridge that leads to open air, pillars of a once-great foundation of a temple. Both said to be not too far from a great Leyline. Kale saw a few Leylines snaking through the valley and almost interweaving between each other: towering multicolored walls that stretched higher than trees. They misted between colors Kale couldn't even recognize; let alone recreate with magnolia buds. "Elesett Volgya," the people of the South called it: Valley of the Fallen. He'd always known them as just the shadowed lands, for even when the sun was at its highest, the walls of the great basin cast darkness in the canyons below. Between lack of water, winding paths through wind-worn canyons, and the dangers of the Leylines, Kale understood why no one dared travel through the god-forsaken land. Kale wanted to be one of the first to, though.

He peered over the edge of the cliff at the steep drop to the side of the bluff. It looked almost hewn by great grooved hammers that carved streaks of red in the iron-rich walls. He should be home now, back to his father's farm. He turned around quickly as to not fall, but fell to his knees in the sandy dirt. A thunderclap echoed and shook the whole of his body.

Kale looked up to see the magnolias shake as a wave of energy blasted them clean of leaves from their branches. Boughs broke and fell with huge cracks as Kale turned on his back to the cliffside. Over the Valley a vortex of light and wind manifested, sucking dust from the canyon below and warping the air around. Kale stared in horror as flocks of fenravens and gulls and larks were devoured by the floating maw; until at once, it ceased. In its place, an unimaginable mass blocked out the sky.

Miles above the valley, the continent spanning landmass floated gracefully. Towers carved into its sides rose like a crown around its perimeter. Shining-white spires hovered untethered, their glowing bases occasionally releasing blue energy into the base of the island. Shining cities sparkled like pearlescent jewels in its slopes. At its highest point, a great tower cascaded upwards into the clouds; its golden tip shining like a second sun. The giant island rested closely above the earth, perfectly completing what emptiness there once was in the valley below. At once, water fell from the land above, and reflected the sunlight it was blocking before. At once, the shadowed lands had become an ultimate light. At once, the broken land had become whole at long last.

Kale immediately snatched up his bound-cloth, once he regained his senses. Furiously sketching the newborn land, he tried his best to capture the immense beauty. He wiped tears from his eyes, overwhelmed with what had happened, desperately trying to soak his surroundings in. From such a great distance, he could barely make out the intricate carving of the white palisades, or the vibrant colors from the gardens. He kept marking on his lambskin until he found it wasn't enough for something so large. He dropped the pad as he continued to stare, when silhouettes appeared in the light, sailing like birds in the air. Kale wiped his eyes again, tracing outlines of wings on flying beings. They grew larger... no, closer. Until five beings flapped huge feathery wings as they approached. Kale couldn't move, his muscles locked; fingers clawing into sand. The five drew closer until he could see the blue of their eyes through the eye-slits of their helms. The lead one drew its spear and spoke in a tongue unheard to Kale before today. It shouted as the blade reached Kale's throat, apparently asking something. All he could do was stare, mouth agape, at their silver armor and weapons.

"My small friend. Welcome to the dominion of Solus the Shining." A voice sounded clearly between Kale's ears. "Please tell my companions from whence you hail." A sixth being revealed itself; a tall one with flowing garments of whites and burgundies. Its features were elegant, feminine and its skin sparkled and glimmered. Its eyes were two glowing pools of cerulean and atop its head spouted hair like flowing water with a crown of black-gold leaves. Though it possessed no wings, it floated as its companions did. Its solemn

face didn't move, but it was clear that it spoke to Kale, "Peh-lass...Pellas? I do not know this name. But searching through your mind proves it to be the land's name now."

The being motioned to its flying soldiers. The six otherworldly creatures started to move away before the shining tall one turned back around. "All may have their place in the glorious empire," it continued in his head. Then, it opened its mouth and speaking with such eloquence: "Welcome, kingdoms of Pellas, to the Empire of the Vanir."