

WIZARD QUEST:
THE CHRONICLE OF MANY SHADOWS
BY,
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[brackets indicate work in progress]

Prologue

The smell inside the empty barrel of brandywine was not what one might think. Oak and caramel mixed with the faint smell of vanilla and cloves—enticing enough for Azir to wipe his finger around the inside rim and taste the remnants. He shouldn't have done that. Smacking his lips to rid them of the bitter taste of the alcohol, Azir's ears twitched at the sound of the wizard coughing. He went still, listening intently, his body poised. Not a single breath escaped his lips. All he could see was a sliver of light squeezing through the cracks. By the Nightlord, he was exhausted.

What kind of wizard seeks esoteric wisdom at the bottom of a barrel of brandywine? By now, I should have been halfway through deciphering the old goat's arcana, not marinating in my own juices.

The soft shuffle of papers and the wizard's grumbles broke the heavy silence. Azir had waited for hours—long, tedious hours. But if the old man was this thorough with his ledgers, imagine what was hidden in that book. The thought sent a thrill through Azir's body. The wizard's spellbook—his future, his *quest*—was just beyond the wine-soaked wood. A tome, bound in cracked leather, filled with arcane scripts requiring the greatest mind to comprehend. Even a glimpse would be enough to sate his curiosity—well...at least for a day or two. Azir's tail twitched, and his limbs ached against the cramped, wooden prison. Beyond the aches and pains, the air was tinged with the stench of dehydrated urine. Time had slipped into an unfathomable blur. But it was worth every cramp and foul sniff.

He'd finally come within reach of acquiring his first spellbook, however everything hinged upon the wizard actually sleeping. No one mentioned how little wizards slept. Azir shifted, trying to get comfortable, but the compact space offered no relief. His hip-flexor cramped sharply, forcing him to stifle a hiss. If he was discovered now—crouched in a barrel like a common thief—his reputation would be ruined. After all, Azir was no petty criminal. He was a scholar, a seeker of wisdom. His thefts were acts of intellectual ambition, not greed.

A grunt sounded from inside the study, followed by a heavy sigh and the closing of a thick ledger. Azir's ears perked up, heart racing. The wizard had finally tired. A loud creak. The wizard pushed back his chair. Azir held his breath, body rigid. Heavy footsteps shuffled across

the floor, followed by the soft clink of a goblet and the snuffing of candle wicks. Silence. The old man muttered something and his robes scraped against stone as he staggered off to bed.

Azir brandished a fanged smile in the darkness. *Finally*. The room and hall fell into deep, profound quiet. Thirty seconds passed as he resisted the urge to lunge out of the barrel. He had to be certain the wizard was fast asleep. After a few pained moments of silence, Azir pushed the barrel's lid just enough to let stale air escape. His vast black eyes absorbed the scene. The darkness had expanded his pupils so much that they swallowed the vibrant green and gold of his irises. The study was bathed in the soft glow of dying embers. Shelves were lined with dusty tomes, and a glimmering collection of gemstones filled the room. His curiosity was piqued, but his focus remained steadfast.

His eyes were locked on one thing—the grimoire. It was bound in dark leather, silver clasps faintly gleaming in the dim light. Azir's heart skipped a beat. It was so close to being within his grasp. Slowly, ever so carefully, he slithered out of the barrel. His lithe frame moved with practiced ease. His padded feet made no sound on the cold stone floor as he crept into the study. Azir approached the looming desk. Elvish symbols lined the rim of the wood. He slipped onto the chair, eyes finally level with the grimoire. As he settled his hand over its cover, a whisper seemed to emanate from the pages. His whiskers twitched. He felt the old magic radiating from it, alive with secrets. His claws opened the clasp with the faintest click. A shiver ran down his spine. With bated breath, he flipped the cover open. The wizard's Arcana, swirling and intricate, danced across the parchment, just out of reach. The script flowed across the page, shifting like liquid. The magic was potent, it was undeniable. Legible text formed before his eyes, almost as if the book was speaking directly to him.

This tome of knowledge is bound to the wizard Lusat of the White Flame, Elf friend. Light alone illumines thy path.

Azir's breath caught. *Light alone illumines thy path*. The words seemed to breathe, alive with purpose. *For all my life I've been a shadow. The dark embrace has blinded my eyes for long enough*. His eyes flicked back to the name on the page: Lusat Kharadhaan. Elf friend.

“Lusat.” The word felt like magic on his tongue. Azir—the wandering rogue of Shaah—was slipping away, dissolving into the shadows that had always cloaked him. In its place, something greater was emerging. The sound of snarls and scratching claws filled the room, coming from a door at the far end of the study. But Azir was unfazed. The hum of the grimoire

drowned out everything else. His mind raced. *The shadow of Azir fades, giving way to the light of the Arcane.*

Straightening, Azir's eyes gleamed with new resolve. His voice was soft but certain, "From this day forth, my name shall be Lusat, the darkness that beckons light. *Shaah'vaziriin'do Do'khaat.*" *Shaah bears witness to my name.*

And with that, Azir—the rogue who once slinked in the shadow—was no more. Lusat, the shadow turned to light, swore to unveil the mysteries that strangled the world in their hidden grasp, vowing to sunder the veil of esotericism that bound it in darkness. Something stirred on the page. A soft glow of white light, and a hum in the air—no, the hum was coming from him. From *inside* him. The soft glow quickly accelerated to a full-bodied shine, and Azir began to reel backward, a warmth from the book bathing his skin.

Old man noises, primarily grunts and curses, rose from the wizard's chambers: "Ceaseless fool of a familiar, if I wasn't spent already I'd dismiss you to your well-deserved everlasting sleep!" Amidst the sound of laggardly approaching steps, the book snapped closed, and Lusat stuffed the heavy tome in his sack. The light would have to wait.

I.

Ko'sha do'zaara'zahn

Sha of the White Moon

The grasping shadows of the forest stretched beneath them, dark tendrils of night clinging to the trunks and branches of the towering trees. Do'shaari prefer high trees, and these certainly stood at an impressive height, each standing above one hundred feet tall with ease. The clan's camp swayed gently in the canopy. Hammocks hung like woven webs between thick branches, each adorned with animal skins that could be fastened shut for privacy or shelter from the elements. The evening was near, and the last light of the sun still shone in the sky. From the center of the camp, flickering candlelight from fat-soaked torches cast a warm, golden hue across the trees and the various dwellings that hung between each trunk and branch. It wasn't typical for *Do'shaari* to have any source of light in their camps—to any *sha'zahn*, light was merely decorative. On any other night, the camp would be in complete darkness—save for any natural moon or starlight—but would often still be teeming with life. In safety, the *Do'shaari* would often play music and perform elaborate rituals conveying different stories within the clan's unique lore, all carried out in the sanctuary of all encompassing darkness that a dense forest provides.

Azir reclined in his hammock, feet resting on the tree, his claws absently digging in and out of the tree's soft bark. The movement gave his sore feet some relief from the aches of the day's long journey. He and his brother, or perhaps his cousin—family origins were never clear in the clans of *Shaah*—had set their tent-like tree dwellings far from the center of camp. The clan of tree dwellers had spent many more days on the road than they were generally accustomed to. After more than a month of traversing the endless steps of the plains, not having been spared the shade of a generous tree for many sun-baked days, the clan had finally reached their destination.

Azir's eyes, large black pits with hardly any space between lid and pupil, traced the lines of an old scroll, one he had read a dozen times before—its yellowed edges worn smooth by his constant handling. Shazahn are particularly well fit for reading in the low light of dusk, or even the darkness of night. His eyes were punctuated by faint rings of gold that seemed to shimmer

and shift in the dim light. When he focused, his pupils would expand into thin vertical slits, capturing every detail with unnerving precision. His ears, filled with sensitive hairs, were typically standing straight atop his head, always listening for the slightest noise. Azir's body was a perfect balance of lithe grace and quiet strength, his limbs long and slender yet taut with muscle from constant movement. His hands, with their tapered fingers and retractable claws, were as adept at handling delicate scrolls as they were at scaling tree trunks or snatching small trinkets. His tail, sleek and expressive, swayed behind him, often flicking in time with his thoughts.

He wore loose trousers that hung low on his hips, perfect for freedom of movement, with a satchel and sling strapped diagonally across his chest, resting against his fur. The sling carried the odd scroll or purloined treasure, while the satchel was filled with the trappings of someone always prepared to explore or make a hasty escape. He wore no shirt, allowing his mottled black fur to provide him with natural warmth and camouflage. His bare feet were toughened from a life of unforgiving wilderness, and they were able to carry him across even the most precarious surfaces. Two small hoop earrings carved of bone pierced through his left ear, one stacked above the other, denoted his rank among his people—*Shii-raan*, the second stage of a Sha's life. He had another bone-piercing through the left nostril of his oily black nose. Though only in the early stages of his journey, his mind often wandered far past the bounds of his age.

Azir stood just over three feet tall, and he was noticeably smaller than most of his cohort. His frame, lean and wiry, was covered in black mottled fur that blended into the shadows with ease. While he lacked the size and strength of some of the others, Azir relied on his swiftness of step and mind to avoid trouble. It wasn't often that he was victimized by the others his age—he was typically too smart to con and too quick to catch. He had a naivety about him that contrasted with his prodigious book smarts and quick cognitive capabilities. He would be able to lecture you about how quickly an object of his size reaches terminal velocity, but would not have had the wherewithal to notice he'd just ran off the cliff's edge.

Azir's material for the evening was an elven text, one he'd stolen from a merchant on their last journey through a distant village, long before their migration east. A volume of history, written in Elvish, but annotated with translations in Illurian. Illurian was developed by Aldoron, the High Lord of Spells, and it had been widely adopted by scholars, merchants, priests, even road wanderers all over the world. While Azir spoke *Sha'thiiri*, he had been determined to learn

Illurian early on in his life—becoming fluent in a short time.

As Azir reviewed the scroll, he was reminded of its historical contents. This volume detailed the rise of an evil sorcerer from the North, a king widely regarded as a walking god by his people. This particular text was centered around the reaction of the elves, which had been one of utter disdain and fear. The perversion of [sorcerer] led the elves to abandon the material plane and return to their realm of primeval origin. This mass exodus marked a decline in the elves' involvement with worldly affairs, giving rise to myriad social orders and a decentralization of global politics into a divided Illuria. According to the text, with the elves' flight, so too left their many wisdoms, songs, and creations. Azir thought to himself as his eyes flicked across the page: *Surely some of their histories were recorded, perhaps the woodland elves might have a few manuscripts from the ancient days.*

Azir had already committed the Illurian translation to memory, and he had been trying to cross-reference the elvish script to learn a bit about the written language. Azir had always wanted to learn elvish...well, always being the last year of his two year old existence.

I wonder if there are any elves in Illu'scendi, perhaps I could pick their brain about [sorcerer]. Who knows, some of them might have actually been there...

Azir could stomach another hundred reads of this text so long as he had something to learn from it, which in this case was the written elvish language. He'd been able to recognize common linguistic motifs through his meticulous examination of the written portion alongside the translation. He had spent enough time with the text that he could, with ease, replicate the text's entire volume of elvish script. Unfortunately, he was acutely aware that no matter how many times he traced the letters and transcribed the words—well what he imagined were words—he would never make any real progress on the pronunciation, grammar, and most importantly, the text's *true* meaning. Azir knew well enough that any text is only worth its interpretations, of which there could be *infinite*.

Azir's eyes wandered from the page as thoughts of desire and curiosity flooded his mind. While he enjoyed learning language and history, these historical volumes, those he'd stolen from the merchant in [westland], failed to quench his unending thirst for something *more*. He'd read for months about famous wizard kings and heroes and villains of legend—bladesmiths and architects, sorcerers and living gods. The storied past of Illuria held more than he could have ever imagined, considering the limitations of his clan's scholarly resources. He had heard the

stories of *Shaah* and the children of shadow, and while they fascinated him, the world beyond tore at him like a hungry wolf. Azir knew he had to know more, he wanted to know the truth about magic. Not the type of magic that allowed the *Naiziir* to weave and manipulate the shadows, that was sorcery, a power granted to those with the innate ability and the will to force—or convince—reality to obey. The shadow weavers used the latter method.

No, the type of magic Azir so intensely coveted was that of a wizard—*Arcana*. That word rang like a bell in his mind over, and over, and over. He swore—ever since the very first moment that concept came into his mind—he would know its depths. *Arcana*, the ability to understand everything. The ability to, through language and study, uncover the very fabrics of reality. All he needed was to find a wizard, learn his *Arcana*—at least enough to read it and understand its meaning—and *take* his spellbook. He was confident that he could self-teach the steps that followed from there, in time. *Arcana* allowed you to do whatever you bring forth from your intellect—and everyone had the potential for it. *Nearly* everyone. Of course some people are better suited for war or farming, but it was a well known fact that anyone could become a wizard—so long as your mind was keen and you were fortunate enough to get an apprenticeship. Without a guide, *Arcana* becomes something unfathomable, so far advanced beyond the lay people of Illuria that many are too daunted to even question the arcane. Some scholars suggest that there are a number of individuals who cannot access the arcane strings and fabrics of the magical weave, but their recorded number was so few that many respected academics wrote them off as being “within the margin of error.”

“The whispers of the page lure you to a distant place *ji'za*.” Za’kir’s voice was soft and low, not unlike the tone of a concerned mother. Za’kir continued, “If only you would learn to listen to the night and whispers of the shade, perhaps then, *Shaah* could finally teach you how to weave properly.”

In an instant, Azir was airborne and falling. He twisted midair instinctively, digging two feet and a hand into the large tree trunk of his chosen dwelling. The scroll dangled precariously from his free hand as he scrambled to hold on. Biting the wooden rod at the scroll’s end, he clenched it between his teeth and began to climb. Ten feet later, Azir was halfway up, giggling and cursing at Za’kir. Stone-faced as always, Za’kir stood atop their woven platform, holding the untied rope he’d slipped from a loose knot. A slow smile tore across the white fur of his face. Unlike most of the Do’shaari, who had either black or mottled grey fur—natural camouflage for

the shadow dwellers—Za’kir was born with pure white fur. This rare blessing had earned him the title *ko’do’zaara’zahn*, meaning “*of the white moon.*”

“Ah, Za’kir, every moment has room for a lesson, huh *ji’za?*” Azir teased, finally reaching the woven platform they had constructed earlier in the day. Standing beside Za’kir, Azir felt small. At nearly five and a half feet tall, Za’kir was broader and more muscular than all of the Sha of the *Do’shaari* clan. Towering above Azir’s just-over-three-foot frame, Za’kir’s worn muscles twitched with stored energy, exposed to the cool night air. His stoic presence, with that calm and strong demeanor, gave him the aura of an immovable stone—yet, his compassion and understanding always peeked through. His expression remained impassive, but his pale blue eyes—cleaved by slit-like black pupils—betrayed the weariness of their long journey.

Traditional Sha jewelry adorned his body: beads strung around his neck and wrists, and three small bone hoops pierced through the cartilage of his left ear, each stacked in a neat row. The rings signified that Za’kir had reached the third stage of spiritual and physical development, known as *Va’shiik*. Dangling from his earlobe was a rectangular pendant, perfectly bisected into two halves: the top shimmered pure white, while the bottom was inky black. At the center, a small golden circle gleamed—a radiant sun set against the stark contrast. Rays of gold shot outward from the circle, stretching across the divide and casting a soft glow as they extended. Black markings, known as *Sha’nazrii*—shadow brands—curled along Za’kir’s body, gifted to him by the *Naiziir*, the clan weavers.

Slung over Za’kir’s shoulder were three pheasants, two rabbits, and a large turkey, all evidence of a successful hunt. In his hand, he carried a sack full of long, fragrant sprigs of wild herbs, their earthy scent filling the air. Azir’s keen nose caught a whiff of tea leaves among them. Hanging from a sling attached to Za’kir’s torso was his longbow, unstrung for now. The bow stave, intricately carved from white animal bone, seemed to shine in the darkness to Azir’s keen eyes. Its string, finely braided sinew, was tucked neatly away, awaiting the next hunt.

“By all the shadows of the night *ji’za*, just look at how fat that bird is!” Azir chuckled with surprising energy, considering they had been traveling all day and had been eating only rations. Although the sight of the food gave way to the pains of hunger, which began to gnaw away at him from the inside out. “You are right, the night *has* blessed us, have you forgotten *why?*” Za’kir stared at him with a look that gave the feeling that he was giving Azir the chance to prove he wasn’t entirely aloof.

“Well.. um, it must have something to do... with... the stars? Right? *Va'zhiir do'shaar rhiim'va zhir'do tiir'ra...*” his voice trailed off slightly before he continued, “...right?” Azir was none too confident from his answer, but it seemed logical enough. The phrase meant, *Starlight that shines on the darkest night carries the brightest of meaning*. Za'kir raised his eyebrows and responded, “Wow, I am impressed, *ji'za*.” He shrugged the forest's bounty from his shoulders and hung the game on an overhead rope. “But you are wrong. Tonight is *Shaah'zaara'diin*, the new moon is upon us.”

“The festival? Are you sure? Your mind may be clouded from hunger *ji'za*.” Azir's eyes began to wander as the realization set in. The darkness had fallen upon the canopy like the crash of an ocean wave. Now, basked in shadow, Azir became aware of flickering light coming from the camp's center platform.

“Ah, right again. So wise and—*portent*.” Azir put a little emphasis on the Illurian word he had learned last week. While most Sha can understand Illurian enough to trade in wares and information, Sha typically spoke in *Sha'thiiri*, meaning literally shadow whispers, but Azir—always a special case—had a knack for languages. Za'kir, of course, was unmoved. He always seemed immune to Azir's teasing. After setting aside his belongings and doing some light stretching, Za'kir began to work. He began by laying out a tanned animal skin—specially treated with oils meant to repel water and preserve food. Having already field dressed and bled each of his bounty, he quickly partitioned the rabbits and pheasants, placing portions of meat on the skin, then wrapping it until folded tightly. As he took out some twine and began tying the package of food, Za'kir spoke again, “These will be for the feast.” Azir's eyes immediately darted back and forth between Za'kir and the turkey. Then, after a brief pause and with a look of pure hunger, Azir let out a murmur of, “and as for the...” he gulped, “...turkey?”

“That is for us *ji'za*. Do not tell the others, and remember *Do'shaar va'shiir tiir'do va'do'shaari*.” And with a wry smile, he finished, “I fear they would be very jealous of our fat bird.” The two companions sat cross legged on their woven platform, enjoying the meal with one another. Amidst their hungry sounds, Za'kir paused for a moment, looking at Azir. “Azir, how are you feeling? Your time is near. Can you hear the whispers of the dark tonight?”

Azir gnawing a leg bone grumbled, “Not yet *ji'za*...” he swallowed a sliver of meat and had a look of uncertainty painted across his face. His eyes rose to meet Za'kir's gaze, “What will

it sound like? And—what will it look like? Is the Nightlord really how they say he is in the stories?”

Za’kir’s eyes fell downward and he set down the turkey leg he’d been working on. With a soft tone, he said, “*Shaah* is everything and more. When the lord of night calls, you will see.” He looked off into the darkness, as if remembering something distant, “The old one’s say his form is fluid, unlike you and I. Our bodies are restricted by a constant pull of light and shadow, while he exists only in the dark. It is sung in *Naru’shah’khiir* that within the domain of shadow, he can take any form he chooses.”

Azir found no comfort in the words of his *ji’za*, and the look of uncertainty remained. “I will share with you the story of my *Do’khaat*, little light.” Za’kir’s eyes seemed to shine in the near pitch darkness of the canopy, some of the far off flickering lights briefly reflecting in the white Sha’s eyes.

He continued, “It was the night after the black moon, Ish-vaan say’s that it sings to him, *calling* him. As the yellow moon fell in the sky, joining the darkness, I knew he would come that night. As I waited, I listened to the wind. I waited for the whispers of the dark—and by *Shaah* they came. I felt the breath of his whisper against my skin as if standing in an open field during a rainstorm, myriad drops of rain falling across me. Then, I heard music, a solemn voice radiating throughout the silence of the night.” Azir’s eyes were wide circles of awe and wonder, hanging on every word as they fled into the night. Za’kir looked into the distant dark, and with a look that suggested he had been contemplating something profound, he continued, “The words spoken by the voice were of an otherworldly tongue, and yet I felt moved. I knew that the darkness would accept me, if I would only *allow* it to. And so I went into the night, guided by the song.”

Azir looked as if he were about to stand and lunge at Za’kir, all thoughts of hunger fleeing to a distant place in his mind. “And? What happened? Did the Nightlord show himself? Tell me *ji’za*, tell me!”

The onslaught of words struck Za’kir and he chuckled, “Be still, the contents of each shadow will reveal itself in time, allow me to continue the story.” Azir sat quietly, resisting the urge to interrupt him, and Za’kir began again, his voice reminiscent of something musical, and he let out a low hum as he spoke, “The voice of night whispered a song, filled with harmonies of a thousand voices. One among them cut through the veil of sound, shining clear as the white moon. It called to me, and it called to *Shaah*. The darkness summoned me to a lakeshore, and

there I found a shadow. The shadow danced across the water like moonlight, and had a voice as clear as glass. The words carried off into the night like the eternal light shining into the abyss.”

Azir’s eyes looked as if they were about to pop right out of his head and fall into the forest beneath. “W-was that *Shaah*? Did the lord of night come to you as a shadow weaver?”

Za’kir shook his head. “No little light. The weaver of shadow was not *Shaah*. I believe that the shadow who whispered to me on that night was the mother of darkness, *Zhi’va’sha’na*. She sang, and while the words she spoke were unfamiliar to me, I knew their meaning.” Now humming louder, Za’kir began to produce a cadence of sound as he began to recite the chant of *Zhi’va’sha’na*. Za’kir’s voice was soft, somber, and droned along, suddenly taking on the cadence as he began to sing the whispered hymn,

Va’Sha’ah khiir’do, va’Sha Sha’riim
Sha’a’riim do’khiir, tiir’do riim va’ziir
Va’Sha’ah khiir’do, va’Sha’riim

Naa’zu khiir’va, sha’na’zrii no’dan
Va’Sha’khiir, tiir do’Zhaa’ra va’riim’zair
Va’Sha khiir’do, va’do sha’zhan

Va’Sha’ah khiir’do, riim’do ji’zaar
Sha’ah’va’khiir, sha’ziin khiir’daan va’ziir
Tiir’raan khiir’va, va’Sha khiir’dan

*O' lord of darkness, O' lord of night
I beckon a darkness, void of the flame
O' lord of darkness, lord of night*

*Swaddled in shadow, thy child steps forth
O' darkness, void of moon, or light of stars
O' sovereign darkness, blood and breath*

*O' lord of darkness, gaze upon thy child
Breath of night, breath of shadow, O' darkness
Unveil thy majesty, O' Shaah*

Za'kir's words wove together in a form of *Sha'thiiri* known as *Va'na'thiiri*, distinct due to its cadence and adherence to a particular syllabic structure. "The shadow stood with her hands outstretched to the stars as she released a long and hallowed note. At that moment, the forest became a cacophony of sound, and the air swirled in a downward spiral from the sky. Like a mist of darkness, the swirling air converged on the shadow, her arms remained outstretched. She accepted him, and he accepted her. As more and more mist fell upon her, her form began to change."

Azir's jaw nearly fell into his lap. Not a word escaped from his lips. The white sha was somewhere else entirely, his face a mask of awe and fear. Uninterrupted Za'kir continued, "Her form began to slither and writhe, a mass of shadows and mist. As the shadow embraced the breath of night, her song sharpened to a trill—a sound like the flute of our *Zhi'va*. It sounded as if she had spent every breath on that single note, and at the moment the misty shadows conjoined and her song came to an end—the night became still. Then, the mass of shadows exploded, and an orb of white light rose above the small lake. A serpentine body made of shadowy smoke trailed behind it. It was adorned with many limbs, each ornamented with claws that seemed to dig into the night as it rose into the air. Hovering, the circular face gazed upon me, the soft light reminiscent of the white moon, and I felt its majesty. The lord of night's body swirled behind him, slithering in the air like a great snake—or like your tail."

Azir's tail had been flicking constantly as thoughts raced in his mind. He restrained the wiggling tail, holding onto it with both hands. He looked upon his *ji'za* with curious eyes, that insisted Za'kir continue.

"The water upon the lake rippled and shone with soft light emanating from the face of *Shaah*. Silence followed. A moment passed as the orb of moonlight softly glowed. I felt his light, little one. As I gazed deep into his eyes, his face became visible for a moment. The lord of night and darkness had a face of moonlit sorrow—gleaming with the light of love—but somber with a look of mourning." Za'kir gazed upon Azir's face, and said, "His face looked just like yours little light, although it seemed old, an ancient visage—wizened with many thousands of years. In the center of his brow sat a white jewel, a bright jewel that cast the moonlit glow."

"Then, *Shaah* began to whisper and the sound of a thousand voices struck me again," said Za'kir. "Among them, a clear and distinct voice pierced through the symphony of sound, and it gave unto me this name, *Za'kir*. And with it came my purpose."

"*Guardian*," said Azir. "The lord of darkness gave you that name, *ji'za*? I thought *Shii'raan* were supposed to choose their own name."

Za'kir nodded slowly and said, "You are correct *ji'za*, many *Shii-raan* do claim their own name. It is rare, but some are granted the gift of a name from the lord of shadows directly."

Azir chewed on the idea for a moment and asked, "What happened next?"

"The lord of night held his gaze for another moment, and after a pause his body began to stir. The floating orb of moonlight that illumined his face remained perfectly still. His long serpentine body coiled upon the surface of the lake and the lord of night slowly looked into the night sky. My eyes followed his gaze into the night, and as I looked upon the many stars, the lord of night shot upward into the dark embrace of the sky. The orb of light grew smaller and smaller as he rose, shedding a misty white light along the way. The soft glow of the moonlit mist fell upon the lake's surface and I felt it upon the fur of my arms and face." Za'kir's lips tightened to a thin smile. "And soon I was once again bathed in the silent shadow of the night." After a pause he said, "Ever since that night I have felt his presence in the dark majesty of *Zhi'va'sha'na*. Every white moon I can feel his embrace, and his sorrow." A chill air blew between the two as the night fell silent again. By the end of it all, Azir looked as if he had seen the face himself.

In the silence, a flute sounded in the distance, toward the center of camp. "Come, let us finish with our meal *ji'za*. The others will be gathering soon."

II.

Naru'doshah'khiir

The Long Shadow of Shaah

The *Do'shaari* camp was a collection of dwellings centered around a large platform. Tightly woven ropes, crafted from a mixture of animal hairs and plant fibers, connected the perimeter homes to the camp's center, where the den of the clan *Zhi'va* was located. The old grey sha sat cross-legged on the central platform, his back resting against the wide tree trunk that anchored the web of ropes. He was frail, with a scraggly grey beard and an angular face. One of his eyes was milky white, while the other had an iris of pale white. Seven hoop earrings pierced the cartilage of his left ear, and he wore a robe of loose white and grey fabric, folded intricately and bound at his waist with a white rope. His grey fur was adorned with intricate black markings that ran across his arms, chest, and neck.

Ish'vaan played a slow tune on a ceremonial flute, the boughs of the tree above hanging heavy in the night air. The large branches swayed gently, creaking and groaning in the wind. Candles made from animal fat and resin burned in carven bone plates, suspended from the branches by iron chains. Like spokes on a wagon wheel, rope beams radiated outward from the gathering platform, leading to the temporary homes of the clan. The warm light of the candles illuminated the branches and woven ropes, casting flickering shadows that seemed to dance in time with the music of the one-eyed sha. As the song came to a natural end, the *Zhi'va* took a deep breath.

"Mm. Gather around me *a'shai*, listen to her song as we wait for my family," he said tilting his head as if listening to something far away. After a moment, he began to play again, as though joining an ongoing melody only he could hear. The shadows continued to flicker, and, over time, figures began to emerge from the darkness. Three small sha, *Shii-raan* who trained under the elder shadow weavers, approached in single file along a rope beam. When they reached the *Zhi'va*, they stood side by side and bowed their heads.

"Ahh, come, my children," the elder said softly. "The others will join us soon. I advise you to listen to the moon, for perhaps one day, you will sing her song." He slid the flute into a sling and began to hum a slow, measured tune. As he sang, the grey sha nimbly climbed up to his

tent, which was fastened to a higher branch. His claws carried him swiftly up the tree, and from above, he called down to the gathering sha, rustling through his belongings. “Just a moment now... I can’t seem to find it...”

More and more sha emerged from the shadows, converging on the central platform. “Ah! Here it is...” Ish’vaan exclaimed, laughing maniacally to himself. As he descended from his tent, a large scroll was slung across his back. The scroll, made from tanned animal skin, was heavier than traditional parchment. By now, the camp had filled with more of his kin, all gathering for the evening’s festivities.

“I’m going to set the food down in the offering circle, Azir,” Za’kir said, hoisting a tightly woven package from his back. He glanced at Azir with a teasing grin. “Perhaps you could speak with Zhuri. I saw her making eyes at you, little light.”

Azir’s eyes widened. “Well, um—she might be busy,” he said, trying to hide his apprehension. “She might be nervous! The performance... I wouldn’t want to bother her.” In truth, Azir often struggled to speak with the others in his cohort. They didn’t share his interest in esoteric histories or scholarly works, and he frequently found himself at a loss for topics of conversation.

“I’m sure she’d appreciate a supportive visit from a friend,” Za’kir replied with a knowing look. He gestured with his eyes toward Zhuri, who stood in a small circle with two others. After making a walking gesture with his fingers, Za’kir turned and slipped away toward the offering circle, leaving Azir standing awkwardly by himself. Azir scanned the gathering, trying not to appear too self-conscious about being alone. His gaze flicked over the trio of young shadow weavers as they huddled together, speaking in hushed tones. Nervously, he began to approach them.

“Hey—” he started, but his words were cut short as something fell around his waist. His pants pooled at his ankles. Zhuri and the other fledgling shadow weavers turned to look at him just as panic surged through Azir. He quickly reached down, grabbed his trousers, and, in a swift motion, leaped into the air. He grasped a nearby branch, pulling himself up into the tree’s canopy. As he hastily tied the drawstring back together, he wondered if he had left the knot untied. Hidden among the shadows of the tree, Azir prayed that Zhuri hadn’t noticed the moment of weakness. *Nice one. Very smooth.*

From a nearby branch, snickering drifted through the dark, tickling Azir’s ears. *Ji’dara.*

That little—

“*Sha’riin do’rhan*. Why must you torment me, Ji’dara?” Azir muttered under his breath.

“Honestly, you should be thanking me. That would’ve been a disaster.” Ji’dara dropped from the branch above him, still snickering. “You should’ve seen your face! A work of art, truly.”

The two had grown up with one another, and as they were members of the same litter, they looked eerily similar. Other than the slight variations of their fur pattern, Ji’dara was slightly more grey than Azir, and he wore a light animal skin tunic with loose trousers.

“I don’t find it very funny.” Azir shot him an annoyed look.

“Now, now, take it easy. The night loves a little mischief in the dark.” Ji’dara gestured downward toward the shadow weavers practicing their movements for the festival. “You know, you’re not going to win her over with more talk of your *scholarly material*.” Ji’dara mocked Azir, poorly pronouncing the Illurian words that essentially meant “books and scrolls.”

“What do you know? You’re hardly one to give advice, seeing as you’re only good for cheap tricks and taking off *my pants*,” Azir chuckled. “When are you going to come up with something new, by the way?”

“Why would I? It works every time and it’s hilarious.” Ji’dara scanned the gathering below, his eyes latching onto the *Zhi’va* as he fluted. “You know *ji’za*, she has already begun shadow-weaving. If you really want to impress her,” his brow rose in the direction of the old grey sha, “perhaps you could take one of the *Do’shar’kha’thiir*.”

Azir blinked, startled by the suggestion. “Ish’vaan’s forbidden scrolls? Are you insane? You are absolutely insane. He would flay me living if I even looked at one.” A look of fear came over Azir’s face.

Ji’dara’s grin widened, eyes gleaming mischievously in the dim light. “Only if you get caught, *ji’za*. And I’ve seen you move—you are a shadow in the night. Besides, think about it: If you had something you could share with her, that was actually *interesting*, who knows—she might actually want to talk with you. It seems like she is very focused on her studies, so you might have to meet her halfway.” Ji’dara glanced down at the elder *Naiziir*, seven elder sha sat hunchbacked, collectively preparing a mixture of herbs. “The elders can be very needy, and I’ve heard they are very secretive with the more subtle arts. If you took one of the *Do’shar’kha’thiir*, you’d be tapping into the forbidden *Nai’shaathir*. Even the elder *Naiziir* haven’t read the scrolls.”

“There’s a reason for that, you know. The last sha who tried to take a scroll was Zu’ni,

and Ish'vaan took her eyes for it. The blinded one is mad, there's no telling what he might do."

Azir's heart raced at the thought. He looked toward Zhuri, still chatting with the other shadow weavers, her silhouette flickering in the candlelight. They practiced movements, like a dance, and Azir thought that he could see the shadows dancing with them. Some of the *Do'shaari*—those that showed a talent for *Nai'shaathir*, shadow weaving—were taken as apprentices under the elder shadow-weavers. The idea of mastering something secret, something powerful enough to catch her attention, tugged at him.

"Ish'vaan is... perceptive. It's not possible..." Azir muttered, more to himself than to Ji'dara, "...unless?" After a pause the two locked eyes and Azir said, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Exactly. Tomorrow is *Zha'kaat*, the perfect opportunity." Ji'dara allowed Azir to chew on the idea.

Surely they won't need me tomorrow, some old man with a few mercenaries...

"Maybe..." Azir tapped his fingers on the branch he and Ji'dara were perched upon, "I must say, my curiosity has been piqued. I've always wondered what knowledge was kept in all the ancient songs."

"Ish'vaan is hiding something, there must be something to those scrolls..." Ji'dara pointed to the *Zhi'va's* den high up in the tree. "I saw him crawl into his tent earlier, perhaps he will keep the scriptures locked away inside during the heist." Azir's hunger for esoteric wisdom came gnawing at him once again, its teeth and gnashing familiar to his mind. Azir's pulse quickened. He glanced toward Zhuri, her form gracefully shifting with the other weavers as they danced in the dark, shadows swirling around their movements. While the thought of impressing his friend was enticing, the thought of what's hidden in those scrolls began to eclipse that motivation.

What could the blinded one be hiding?

"You know, come to think of it, I've never seen Ish'vaan weave the shadows—not once. Yet the elder weavers still bow to him...weird." Said Ji'dara, his eyes wandering for a moment. Azir filled the silence between them with thoughts.

While the clan is distracted with the heist, I can slip into the Zhi'va's den, steal the scroll, then sneak into the forest and study its contents. I'll have it back before they return and no one will even notice I was missing.

“Looks like everyone is starting to gather for the feast.” Ji’dara began to crawl along the bough of the tree and he gestured to Azir and said, “You coming?”

“You go ahead. I prefer to follow—keep my eyes on you.” Azir lingered high in the canopy for a few moments while eyeing both the *Zhi’va* and his tent. Ish’vaan’s eyes were shut as he played, softly swaying with the breeze and the sound of his music.

Of course. The scrolls. Ji’dara may be born of a dull moon but he’s right. I’ve read my library of works over tenfold. If I could just—

Azir’s body and mind froze as he locked eyes with the one eyed sha. He was paralyzed, a rush of cold seeping into his bones. The sound of roaring blood filled his ears, drowning out everything. Time seemed like it was frozen alongside him. For that brief, suffocating moment, he couldn’t move, couldn’t breathe. It was as though the *Zhi’va* had seized him with unseen threads of shadow. Just as suddenly as it had come about, the force seizing Azir’s body was gone. Azir gasped, barely suppressing a shudder as he averted his gaze. *Surely he wasn’t looking at me?* His thoughts raced, heart pounding against his ribs. Azir let his eyes wander, trying to look casual, but the fear that loomed over him was suffocating. He started to imagine the *Zhi’va* grabbing hold of him with all the shadows of the night and ripping him apart. Eventually, he couldn’t resist, and he glanced at his elder once again. Playing his flute, as if nothing had happened. The music drifted lazily through the air, soft and unbroken. Azir’s heart and thoughts quickened as they spiraled. *By the night, I must’ve imagined it... sometimes it feels like he has eyes hidden in the trees.*

“*Shai’naru’do’a’shai*, gather and sit before the offering circle. It is time.” The frail grey sha beckoned to the *Do’shaari* as he stowed his flute, continuing the hum once more. He climbed a few meters up the trunk of the tree and pinned the heavy scroll high upon its bark. The rest of the clan sat arrayed in a semi-circle, all awaiting a portion of food from the offerings. The elder weavers burned incense as they gave food to each of the clan members who sat before the *Zhi’va*. The hanging candles flickered softly, and the hum of conversation melded together with Ish’vaan’s song in the night. Ish’vaan’s voice rang out amongst the soft chatter of the crowd. His voice was frail like his body, but his words carried the weight of his wizened authority, “Tonight, we come together in reverence—we gather as the children of *Zhi’va’sha’na*, under the watchful gaze of *Shaah*. The black moon sings, *Shaah’zaara’diin* calls us forth, and we are one. In the light of the white and yellow moons, we are many shadows, but in the darkness of her embrace,

we meld as one. Tonight, we shall hear her song, the whisper of night and shadow, and learn *Naru'doshah'khiir.*”

In a swift movement, Ish'vaan outstretched his hand toward the scroll hanging above fastened to the trunk of the tree. The latch on the scroll tore free, as if it had been sliced open. The long scroll unfolded down the length of the tree trunk, revealing an intricate weave of *Sha'thiiri* script and paintings. The crowd was sat on the ground as they passed around a pipe filled with specially gathered and prepared ceremonial herbs. Smoke rose around them, an amalgamation of scent coming swirling by each attendee. The breeze slowed as Azir approached, the haze of smoke flowing before his eyes. At the front of the semi circle, nearest to *Zhi'va's* platform Zhuri sat with her fellow *Na'shir'ra*—the apprentice shadow weavers.

It's too late. Maybe I'll talk with her after the festival. Azir felt a sense of relief. Although he often felt anxiety from the thought of socializing, Zhuri had a way of comforting him with her calm demeanor and soft voice. She always listened to his ramblings, though he could tell that she did out of courtesy rather than interest. Zhuri rose with the other *Na'shir'ra* and they approached the center of the gathering, taking a readied pose just before Ish'vaan as he commenced the ceremony. “Sit before the mother of darkness on this night of a black moon, and listen. Listen to *Sha'riim do'Zhi'va'zhan sha'thiir.*” As the elder sha began the tale, the *Na'shir'ra* started to dance.

The Whisper of Eternal Darkness

In the far and distant time, before light had kindled its first flame, before even shadow had stirred upon the face of the deep, there was but Zhi'va'zhan, the One Without Form. Zhi'va'zhan was the ineffable darkness, vast and unfathomed, a boundless sea of night in which all things slumbered, waiting to be called into life. No shape nor name adorned this endless void, and time itself lay in silence. All things that were, and all things that would ever be, were held in the breathless stillness of that timeless expanse.

Ish'vaan paused for a moment and among the silent crowd he asked, “Take a look around, can you imagine it?” The *Zhi'va* gestured toward the expansive darkness that surrounded

camp. It was as if the gathering was set upon a flickering island of light surrounded by a void. “Do you know what the true dark holds?” A breeze passed over the crowd and silence followed. The *Na'shir'ra* made a circle and slowed to a stop as Ish'vaan continued to recite the scroll. Azir, having been passed the ceremonial pipe, accepted it, and took a long draw from the burning basin of fragrant herbs. This was his first time, and his thoughts reflected his inexperience, *Za'kir did say it was only for ritualistic purposes and totally harmless...*

It is said that in the deepest heart of the void, the Eternal Darkness began to stir, for within Zhi'va'zhan lay a yearning to know itself. No eyes had ever gazed upon its depths, and no voice had spoken its name. In that long silence, Zhi'va'zhan sought to behold its own being. But there was no mirror to reflect the endless night, no light to cast a shadow. Thus, Zhi'va'zhan, in its seeking, performed the first great act: Ti'raash, the Great Withdrawal.

The *Na'shir'ra* lept and flipped about, and their arms moved in elaborate patterns. As they moved, the soft breeze became a howling cyclonic beast. Zhuri and the others danced in wild circles as the gusts of wind began to abduct the flames of each candle. Rather than being snuffed out, the flames began to writhe and strengthen, turning white as they swirled. Sounds of shock and awe came from the crowd, and Azir couldn't believe his eyes. The flames separated into misty white smoke, and the light coalesced in the middle of the gathering forming a sphere of misty white light.

Like a mighty wind pulling back upon itself, Zhi'va'zhan drew inward, and from that contraction, there came a hollow—a vast space carved out of the endless night. The void opened within itself, and in that space was born the first glimmer of separation. In this hollow of the Eternal Darkness, something new stirred. From this emptiness, the first shadow was cast, for in its retreat, Zhi'va'zhan beheld its own reflection at last.

Azir watched Ish'vaan as he moved upon the platform. The *Zhi'va* paced back and forth, hands clasped behind his back. Long shadows were cast from the light, each audience member accompanied by their dark reflection.

And so the first shape, the first form, came to be. Yet in the casting of this shadow, Zhi'va'zhan was sundered. Two beings arose where once there had been one. From the formless void sprang forth Shaah, the first shadow, who took form beside the darkness. And yet the void remained as it had been—eternal, unending, the cradle of all that is and was. This was Zhi'va'Sha'na, the Mother of Darkness, who holds the night within her embrace, for it is from her that all shadows are born.

The shadows of each clan member began to *move*. Azir's head spun, and sure enough, his shadow was moving on its own. Like wriggling little creatures, each shade tore away from its host.

Though divided, the two were ever bound. Zhi'va'Sha'na, the endless night, and Shaah, the shadow who walks beside her, shared a single breath. One could not be without the other. Yet in the sundering, Shaah—though born of form—became a prisoner of the void. For the Mother of Darkness, the source of all things, held dominion over Shaah, and without her song, he was formless, as a shadow lost in the deep. It was decreed in that time beyond time that Shaah would never walk the world freely, but only rise when Zhi'va'Sha'na called him forth from the depths of shadow.

Ish'vaan swiftly released the flute from its sling, casting a sudden trill among the crowd. The humanoid shadows rose and they danced along with the *Na'shir'ra*. The ghostly shades glided in circles, circumventing the glowing orb of white moonlight. With every candle snuffed, the void surrounding the gathering grew ever present.

Yet though Shaah was bound to the will of the Mother of Darkness, a mark was placed upon him at his birth—Va'zariim, the jewel of first light. Set upon Shaah's brow is a jewel, radiant and unyielding, shining with the pale glow of a distant star. This jewel is said to carry within it a fragment of the void's first separation—the light of understanding, born from the darkness itself. It is a symbol of Shaah's divided nature, of the light that was torn from the Great Darkness in the moment of his creation, and of the eternal bond he shares with Zhi'va'Sha'na.

Guided by the movements of the *Na'shir'ra* the shadows danced, they slowly swirled into one another. The dark figures became deformed and soon all distinction was lost. The shadows formed a perfect inky black ring that slowly revolved below and around the orb of moonlight, like a great black serpent swallowing its own tail. The ring began to dissolve as black shadowmist flowed into the center from all points. A sha-like face slowly began to form just below the orb of light, as if grasping at its essence. A long inky black body like a serpent with many arms trailed behind it.

The light of the jewel never dims, even as Shaah walks in the deepest night, for it is his guide through the formless dark. Yet the jewel is also his curse, for it binds him ever closer to the Mother of Darkness. When Zhi'va'Sha'na sings her song, the jewel awakens, glowing with the first light of creation, and Shaah is called forth from the shadows.

Ish'vaan turned his back to the crowd and outstretched his hands. While looking upon the scroll, he began a low pitched song. The words felt like a drum with a steady rhythm, and Azir felt a chill run through his body. He thought back to Za'kir's story as he looked on, his eyes fraught with awe and reverence. The shadowy lord's face and body became fully formed from the black ring, which now resembles a coiled snake with many arms and claws lining its serpentine body. The head inched closer to the orb, wherein the center laid a singular shining jewel. As soon as the jewel reached *Shaah's* brow, a mystifying gleam emanated from its core.

The body snapped furiously with unimaginable agility. Sha instinctively ducked and dodged the many obsidian claws that flung about. Cries of uncertainty and shock rang out into the night. The dance of the *Na'shir'ra* did not cease.

The lord of night's serpentine body writhed and flicked like a tail, sending onlookers to the ground. With unnerving speed, *Shaah* took flight. He flew above the crowd, narrowly avoiding the churning wave of bodies. The snake-like sha seemed to be frantically sniffing the air and looking in every direction off into the darkness. Azir rolled just as the flying serpentine god of his people passed over his head. *What is the Zhi'va doing? And the Na'shir'ra? What was in that pipe?* Thoughts of panic crept into his mind as he refocused his eyes on the *Zhi'va* and *Zhuri* dancing. The *Zhi'va* continued to sing the harrowing song, and the *Na'shir'ra* continued their performance, weaving through the mob. They were completely unbothered, continuing the ceremony as if nothing were wrong. The other clan members were in an uproar. Crawling along the ground, Azir scanned the scene. Not all in the crowd stirred. The elder *Naiziir* remained seated in their hunchbacked postures, remaining still. *Za'kir* sat, his eyes tracking the flying visage of *Shaah*, and his head slightly bowed. Azir bolted over to him and with a frantic voice said, "Za'kir! What's happening?"

"Listen to her song little light. Sit and listen. You will know its meaning." *Za'kir's* voice was calm and knowing. "He is looking for her, but she is not here." *Za'kir* closed his eyes. "Listen." Azir followed, closing his eyes and slightly lowering his head. He heard the song of *Ish'vaan*, and while it sounded foreign some words he understood. *Ish'vaan* sang a song of longing for *Shaah*, a request for him to be among his many shadows. A song that commended acceptance and recognition. A song that demanded *Shaah* cease his endless abscondment.

Azir opened his eyes just as the song seemed to slow. *Ish'vaan* slowly raised his flute to his lips, letting out a melody Azir had never heard. The visage of *Shaah* slowed to a stop. He turned his head in the *Zhi'va's* direction. In an instant, the serpentine figure shot in the direction of *Ish'vaan* as he played. Azir wasn't sure what would happen next. Just as it seemed the flying shadow would ram into the frail grey elder, *Ish'vaan* struck the shadow with lightning speed and precision. He held the jewel of first light precariously between his claws and slowly lifted his hand to the crowd, gazing into its luster. The serpentine body of *Shaah* sat frozen, his tail like body floating in the air as his face stared intently into the jewel as *Ish'vaan* held it. For the moment, the panic in the crowd seemed to subside as the scene drew their attention.

*But without her song, the light fades, and Shaah is
swallowed once more by the void from which he came, the jewel
upon his brow dimming into stillness.*

Ish'vaan held the jewel as it cracked, allowing slivers of silvery light to escape. Gasps radiated throughout the group as the jewel exploded and rained silver mist upon the gathering. The *Na'shir'ra* kneeled in a triangle around the *Zhi'va* as Ish'vaan completed his retelling of the scroll.

*Thus, Shaah, the Nightlord, the first and greatest shadow,
walks only when her voice awakens him. When she sings the song
of night, the jewel upon Shaah's brow gleams like a distant star,
casting its pale light into the world. He rises like mist upon the
hills, silent and unseen, the breath of the night that moves between
the trees. Without her call, Shaah remains hidden in the folds of
shadow, formless and forgotten, waiting eternally to be summoned.*

*And so it is told that Shaah, once whole and sovereign, now
wanders only when the Mother of Darkness wills it. He is the
shadow cast by the night, the unseen spirit that moves in silence.
Only when Zhi'va'Sha'na, the First Darkness, sings her song, does
Shaah take form. The light of the jewel upon his brow shines like
the memory of the first dawn, a promise of light hidden deep within
the true dark, forever bound to the will of the domain from which
he was born.*

To Azir, the experience felt dream-like. Reality seemed slightly blurred as it happened, and the memory of the images seemed to slip from his mind. Ish'vaan addressed the group, “*Shaah al*

III.

IV.

Glossary

A'shai: A term used for addressing a group, likely in a ceremonial or gathering context, referring to those present in a respectful or affectionate manner.

Arcana: The type of magic practiced by wizards that involves using language and study to uncover the deepest truths of reality. Anyone with a keen mind and proper guidance can theoretically access Arcana.

Do'shaari: Azir's clan of Shazahn who live among the trees, preferring high altitudes for their dwellings.

Do'shar'kha'thiir: Forbidden *Sha'thiiri* scrolls, texts or scriptures that contain dangerous or secret knowledge, particularly related to shadow-weaving arts.

Illurian: A widely adopted scholarly and trade language developed by Aldoron, the High Lord of Spells. It's used by scholars, merchants, and priests.

Ji'za: A term of endearment or familiarity between siblings, cousins, or close companions, used often among the Sha.

Ko'do'zaara'zahn: A title given to Za'kir, meaning "of the white moon," referring to his rare white fur, considered a blessing among the Sha.

Nai'shaathir: The art of shadow-weaving, a sorcerous skill associated with manipulating shadows. Practiced by the *Naiziir*, the shadow-weavers of the clan.

Naiziir: Shadow-weavers, or those skilled in the art of *Nai'shaathir*. They are the clan weavers.

Nashir'ra: Young shadow-weavers, or apprentices learning the art of *Nai'shaathir* under the elder *Naiziir*.

Naru'shah'khiir: A sacred text or hymn, possibly related to the Lord of Night and his domain of shadow. It contains stories or teachings about Shaah's powers and his connection to the Sha'zahn.

Naru'doshah'khiir: A ceremonial phrase or reference to the "Long Shadow of Shaah." It signifies a sacred moment or the performance of an ancient ritual which conveys the primeval origin of *Shaah*.

Sha: A general term for the members of the Shazahn, a catlike race connected to shadows, night, and the mysterious deity Shaah.

Sha'nazrii: Shadow brands or black markings that curl along a Sha's body, marking their connection to shadow and the night. These are often given by the Naiziir upon a Sha's transition from one stage of life to another.

Sha'thiiri: The language of the Sha, meaning "shadow whispers." It's used for storytelling, rituals, and daily communication among the Sha'kin. This language often carries cadence and rhythm, especially in chants and songs.

Shaah: The deity of night and shadows, worshiped or revered by the Sha. *Shaah*'s presence is felt in the darkness, and he is believed to bestow gifts of shadow-weaving upon his chosen followers.

Shaah'zaara'diin: A festival or significant event related to the new moon and the worship of Shaah. It is a time for ritual and storytelling among the Sha.

Shaah'vaziriin'do Do'khaat: A phrase meaning "Shaah bears witness to my name," spoken by Azir during his transformation and vow. It symbolizes his newfound identity and connection to the arcane.

Shii'raan: A young Sha, the second stage of a Sha's life, symbolized by bone piercings or jewelry that mark their status. Azir, for example, is in this stage, denoted by his two bone hoop earrings.

Va'shiik: The third stage of a Sha's development, both spiritually and physically. Sha who have reached this stage often bear more piercings, jewelry, and signs of spiritual maturity.

Va'na'thiiri: A form of Sha'thiiri that follows a specific cadence and syllabic structure, used for storytelling or chanting. This is the form in which Za'kir tells the story of the Mother of Darkness.

Zha'kaat: A planned heist or operation undertaken by the Sha, typically involving theft or ambush. It often involves the entire clan, and Azir plans to use the upcoming Zha'kaat as a distraction to steal a forbidden scroll.

Zhi'va'sha'na: The Mother of Darkness, a deity or spiritual figure closely related to Shaah. She is described in stories as a shadowy figure, and her song guides those who seek to embrace the darkness.

Zhi'va: The title of the elder in the Do'shaari clan, referring specifically to the old sha who leads rituals and oversees spiritual matters. Ish'vaan is the current Zhi'va of Azir's clan.

Notes (not cannon)