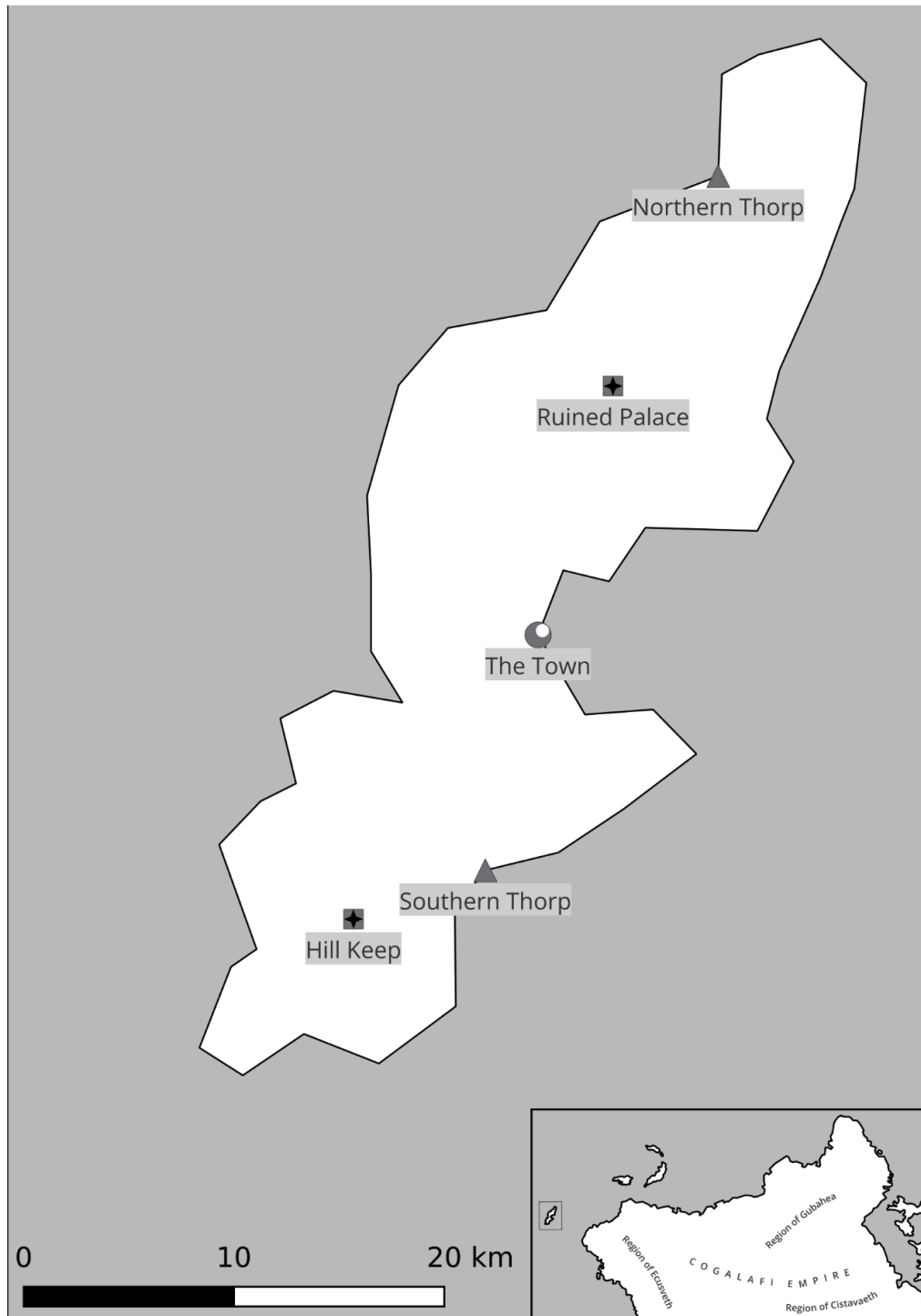


Chapter 1: Those with Not Enough

LEALM ISLAND



First Chapter: Those with Not Enough

Perhaps the early winter had snuck up on autumn like an uncouth vagabond pouncing on an unsuspecting maiden. Or maybe it was the unsettling atmosphere stemming from the stubborn attitude of the islanders. Those fools chose to fear the changing times. Enslaved by their own boorish customs and ancient traditions—time after time—they refused to embrace the enlightenment available to them. Once the Easterner arrived, even they would bow their thick heads to tides of innovation. He would bring the order and the sovereign's justice into the abyss.

Out of all places, why must I be trapped here? Azubi lamented in a poorly heated bath. She missed the company of her many friends. Alas, most of them had already been taken by valiant men of the mainland. She still exchanged letters with some of them, but it wasn't quite the same. Drunken rovers had sullied those who remained and were now too busy raising their undesired offspring to visit her.

No matter, I don't need them. Still, their fortunes bothered her. She was nubile and had been for many years. Yet, her suitors were nowhere to be seen. Why was it so? Was her status not above any other maiden on the island? She should have been the most desirable without a contest. It made little sense. Was it her father? Did his menacing aura keep suitors at bay? Or perhaps there was another reason... No, it could not be her own fault. Could it?

Rising from her bath barrel, she stared at the dress her slaves had prepared. This rubbish garment was the best her father could afford. While few people on the Island had the means to dye their clothing indigo, the gown still didn't contain the slightest sight of silk. What would the Easterner think of it? Back in the sovereign's capital, everyone wore silk; at least that's what the merchants kept telling her. To be the richest family on Lealm Island and still so indecent couldn't be more humiliating. While the northern half of the continent might have been bereft of such luxury items, it wasn't an excuse for not obtaining them. After all, high reward was just the yolk of risk.

Once dressed, Azubi strode through the howling halls of her father's pitiful palace. As she ascended the creaky stairs, a dozen slaves greeted her; young women and old men in rags. Naturally, none were men in their prime; her father had made sure of it. He was far too prudent to let the incident of her grandfather repeat itself. He might have personally captured the bulk of them in the raids of the mainland, but while looking at them, Azubi only saw one man's lack of ambition. *You'd think the lord of the island would be above such plunder of questionable value.* But no, her father always kept choosing the easiest targets with the lowest risk.

Truth be told, Azubi would have traded all these anxiously staring people for a bolt of silk. Then again, they probably weren't even worth as much. These people—no, their mere existence

taunted her. It wasn't the fact they were thralls, but that they had come to accept their lot in life. Any self-respecting slave would have sought to liberate themselves, either by escaping or by cutting their master's throat like her grandfather had done. That's what Azubi would have done if in their position.

"Mistress Azubi, was the bathwater to your satisfaction?" her favorite, Hem, carefully asked. Of course, Hem wasn't her real name; only the one she had bestowed on her. After all, slaves didn't deserve real names. Why would they?

She met Hem's warm eyes with a stare that was nearly as cold as the water in her bath. Hem threw herself to the wooden floor. Her bruised arms grabbed Azubi's humid left leg.

"Mistress, I'm terribly sorry. It won't occur again—"

Azubi wrestled control of her leg back and landed a kick on Hem's jaw. As flowing blood escaped from her mouth, the flame in her brown eyes burned ever so brightly. Though Azubi hadn't seen it for a while, the defiant spirit in her still survived. Its existence alone made her Azubi's favorite. *Do it! Stand up to me.* Azubi screamed internally. For a moment, she was optimistic Hem would attack her, perhaps even kill her. But the moment passed and Hem's temper faded. *How disappointing.*

"Forgive me, mistress... I will accept my punishment."

From the look of her bruises, it was apparent her body had not fully recovered from the last punishment. Spoiling her with mercy wasn't good for her. Unfortunately, she didn't have the time to discipline her properly.

"Never mind that. Where is my father?" Azubi asked as the eyes of the slaves widened in horror.

"A ship was sighted a moment ago. Hence, the Lord left to receive the Easterner," Hem muttered from the floor.

Azubi slapped Hem's freckled cheek without thinking. Maybe there was time for some punishment after all.

"How could you *not* inform me?"

This wasn't good. The broads of the island would throw themselves at the Easterner, and seek to win his favor in desolate desperation. How could her father leave without her? She had to make haste to the Town.

"Mistress, we dared not to disturb your bath..."

"Well... you should have known better," Azubi said, pushing the slaves aside.

She rushed out of the corridor into the outdoors, where the gushing wind whipped her as the sunlight departed. Her father's wooden fort stood atop the highest hill of Lealm Island. The steep slopes of the hill compensated for a lack of defensive walls around the keep.

The fort was the key to controlling the island, as there were no other strongholds. Thirty thanes were sufficient to hold it against a hundred attackers. Azubi had seen that play out more than once; not a single year would go by without some opportunistic rovers challenging her father by invading the island. As was evident by the many burial mounds around the hill, each incursion ended the same. The bravest died on the hill, while the cravens fled. *What a foolish way to die*, she thought while descending the hill. Then again, there was something primal in men's willingness to throw themselves into mortal danger. Sometimes she even rooted for the distinguished marauders. In many of her dreams, the ruffians beheaded her father and took her as their concubine.

At last, she reached the stable at the foot of the hill. There she would obtain a mount—how could this be? The stable stood horseless.

"Oh, Mistress Azubi I—" the stable boy greeted as he jumped out of the hay pile.

The lazy bastard was doing nothing as usual. Azubi pressed him against the half-rotten wall of the stable; it didn't require much strength, for this malnourished boy was shorter than she.

"The steeds, where are they?" she fiercely demanded.

"Master Fulac...he seized them in a hurry."

"What do you mean? All of them?"

It made little sense. Her father owned nearly half a hundred horses. In all practicality, they were never mounted at the same time. Did her father fear the Easterner enough to call all his thanes to arms? Igniting a conflict with the sovereign's representative would have been his most foolish act.

"Yes..." he huffed like a wimp.

Azubi eased her hold and the stable boy fell to the ground gasping for air.

"Very well... I suppose it can't be helped."

Azubi turned her eyes to the old litter resting on the stable's corner. Not the most comfortable transport, but it would have to do. Yet her gaze toward the litter wasn't enough to get the boy on his feet, as he selfishly continued gasping. *What a dense sloth*. She couldn't fathom why some people thought he had vicarial ancestry. Unlike her grandfather, the ancient vicars had been of

good birth. Elegance like that remained in the blood for generations. The lack of such fine refinement was evident in this baffling commoner.

“What are you waiting for? Go! Fetch your cousins!”

Within a moment's notice, two of the stable boy's cousins appeared in the stable. Those hideous yet tall men had little purpose in the world they had been born into. They were too slow to be thanes, too dumb to be craftsmen, and even too clumsy to fish. The only thing they were good for was carrying the litter. She entered the small carriage, and the goons lifted the attached wooden beam.

Then she realized that she didn't know where they should head. The keep's stable stood on the island's southern portion, not far from the coast. However, the Easterner was likely to arrive in the Town as did all foreigners, for it was more or less the only port in Lealm Island. The problem was the Town's location. The ancient colonists had chosen the coast next to a sheltered bay in the middle of the island as its ideal location. It meant a litter wouldn't reach it in time, even if a horse would have. It however, was reachable by a ship... Yes, there was a certain thorp on the rocky shore near them. They must have fishing boats. As they headed there, they penetrated through a thick forest using a poorly maintained dirt track. Azubi and her whip played no insignificant part in their speed acceleration.

“Faster, you inbred imbeciles!” she shouted after every lash.

In the end, she might have been overtaken by a zeal for the lashes. Suddenly, the front litter carrier screamed in pain. Perhaps he stepped on a sharp stone, or perhaps the whip hit him in a sensitive spot. The fool dropped the wooden beam and ran off into the woods, followed by his brother. The sudden stop threw the carriage on its side, and Azubi fell into the dirt. *Animals!* She cursed in her mind; inspecting her dirt-ridden gown.

Her day brightened when she came across a familiar tree. Some knew it as the Vicar's Tree. Supposedly, the last vicar of the island had been hanged from it. Of course, those were mere rumors. Perhaps they had been entirely fabricated by the bored villagers. Young Azubi had been drawn to its remarkable height. She and her three brothers had competed in climbing it. How she missed two of them. Few could fathom the ambition and valor they had possessed. Had her father been more reasonable, they might still be alive.

The tree's placement here meant she was closer than she had thought. Azubi sighed in relief. There would still be time to reach the Town before the Easterner arrived there. To her best effort, she ran the rest of the way to the Town.

At last, she lumbered into the Southern Thorp. Ten earth lodges, three piers, and a rocky beach between them, that was all there was to see. Strangely, it was exactly as she remembered it, despite not having visited since her mother perished.

How bewildering it was to imagine that without this humble settlement, the keep on the hill might not have been built. More than a century ago, the vicar had ordered the construction of the hill keep to protect the Southern Thorp from the increasing attacks of the rovers. How ironic that such a pragmatic act led to the fall of the vicars years later.

A lone boat rested on a pier. Far from the grand entrance she had hoped for, but it would have to suffice. She turned her eyes to the three women salting fish on the rocky shore. If there were truly no men around to ferry her, these women had to.

As Azubi approached them, she piqued their curiosity. Azubi felt flattered; such a strange emotion. Few folks were happy to see her. *She was blessing these lowly peasants with her noble presence. Of course, they would be delighted to aid her.*

“Lord’s daughter, huh? Haven’t seen you in a decade. Did you take a wrong turn?” one of the older women asked in an amusing tone.

Her skin was as dry as the salt she was handling. The countless tiny cracks around her stood out as another ominous characteristic. Something strange sparked in her eyes. As if they were a whirlpool that drained the light. Out of all the undesirable people Azubi had come across, these women had to be some of the ugliest. She began to feel disgusted by their mere presence. Could she tolerate these women the entire voyage? Even their breath smelled like a mixture of blood and rotten eggs.

“No, but I need—” Azubi tried in vain.

“Is it true? You still haven’t wed?” another crone interrupted.

Her blood-ridden nails were deviant in their sharpness, like those of a crow. Perhaps they could even blind someone. *What possible purpose could such sharpness have?*

“That’s mere rumor, dear. Of course, she must have,” a third maid joined the conversation.

The texture of her dark hair was slightly similar to that of a snake’s scale. Upon further reflection, all of those women shared that feature. *Is that what happens to one whose diet consists of fish and nothing more?* Azubi wondered.

“Doubt it. We would have heard of it by now.”

“You truly reckon not even the lowest of thanes took interest in her? Bogus, I say!”

How did they know to make such daunting remarks? They must have connections to the thanes themselves. Perhaps some of her father's thanes lived within the village.

"In truth, she's awfully plain, unlike her late mother."

All women let out a light chuckle. How could these lowlives speak of her as if she wasn't there? Azubi's hand grasped for her whip. Unfortunately, she then realized she had dropped it when she fell out of the carriage.

"Dear, it isn't about the looks, but the legacy. Once her father passes on, she will be without worth."

"In that, you are wrong for I still have a brother—" Azubi tried rejoining the conversation, but was interrupted once more.

"What you mean to say is her value is less than the clothes on her back?"

Then Azubi saw it plain as a day, the cracks in all of their skin were spreading as they spoke. Until pieces of their dried skin began falling out, revealing black gangrene underneath. Azubi wanted to vomit. *What was that? Was it some type of disease? What if I was infected with it?*

"Exactly, my dear. Maybe she will join us here," she said and revealed her bloody teeth to be as long as her nails.

"I certainly don't wish that. As said by you, she would be of little aid to us."

Azubi might have imagined a change in their vocal pitch. Yet, she could have sworn it grew nasal every passing moment. At times, it was difficult to understand.

"What would she be good for, you reckon?"

"Serving the pleasures of men, mayhaps?"

By this point, no skin was left on the women, for it had all fallen off. Azubi was staring at three creatures completely ingrained in gangrene. Their nails had become claws. Their hair had been replaced with something disgustingly squishy-looking. Their eyes were sharp and reddish. And on their backs, something was itching to get out. What was happening?

"Dear, you overlook the strumpets. Even their establishments have standards. I say, even my husband wouldn't pay for her."

Another wave of laughter and croaks followed the remark. Azubi could take the mockery no longer.

“Wicked wenches! Sail me into the Town! Refuse, and my father will punish you accordingly!” Azubi shouted as loud as she could; her usual composure had abandoned her.

“What for? The Easterner will never notice someone as homely as you, dear.”

Suddenly, large leather wings infected with boils, and tumors tore through the three women’s dresses. She had been speaking to harpies.

“Indeed, she’ll be better off marrying one of those simpletons. That’s all she is good for,” another harpy gibbed.

The harpies giggled like young maids. Fearful of what they might do as the conversation progressed, Azubi headed for the ship alone. She would make his way to the Easterner, even if she had to steer the ship alone.

As she stepped on the pier, the sky had gone stark black. Such darkness was most unusual. When Azubi peaked on the fishing boat, to her shock, it wasn’t empty. On board rested a naked woman full of deep wounds and bad bruises. Exactly, like Azubi had remembered her back on the day.

“Azubi?” the woman uttered as she coughed blood. Her dry voice was weak.

“Mother?” Azubi replied in shock and confusion. She jumped into the boat. The creature that looked like her mother reached for Azubi’s leg like Hem had, but her hands were cold as if they were composed of ice. As quickly as the hands had wrapped around her legs, she turned into a pile of ash. The wind grabbed the ash particles and scattered them into the ocean.

Suddenly, the sky began birthing heavy drops of blood. Azubi turned her head towards the shore. The harpies had broken into the air and were heading towards the ship. What did they want? Azubi knew she had to move. She removed the boat’s rope and pushed the ship away from the pier. Fortunately, the wind immediately grabbed the sails and began moving the ship with great momentum toward the open sea. Maybe she would reach the Town in time.

However, the cries of flying harpies behind them grew louder as they approached; they could not be outrun. Soon they were circling the ship like vultures. Then something slammed into the ship; the harpies dropped something small. It rolled on the deck. Azubi realized it was a head. It’s firm facial structure and that ungodly beard.... That head could only belong to one person, that being her father. *What was happening? Why did it smile?*

Another head fell next to it. Azubi recognized this as well but was less shocked. Her little brother’s bloated face was smug as always.

Then the third harpy dropped the last head. This time Azubi caught it mid-air. It was her own. Startled by it, it slipped Azubi’s hand. Without intention, it fell into the blood-red ocean.

As soon as the head had fallen, a whirlwind manifested itself in front of the ship. Azubi stared at the whirlwind defiantly. *If this is the will of the gods, who am I to defy it?* Then, someone or something pushed her out of the ship with great power. As the whirlwind engulfed her, she heard a stranger's goodbye: "Azubi, I'm sorry it had come to this!"

She fell deep into the ocean floor and landed on a gigantic hand. Its palm began closing. Soon, there was no light left, only darkness. Yet, she didn't feel any pain, she didn't feel anything. She had been reduced to a hollow being in eternal darkness.

Chapter 2

Second Chapter: Those with Little

Condal had made himself comfortable in a pile of hay where he slept every day.

Prototype

Chapter I: A Hero's Welcome

The shimmering sunset illuminated the petrified face of Azubi's father. The distant horizon demanded his stare. *He must have seen something beyond the rocky beach.* The howling wind teased his ragged cape as the merciless waves hit the nearby pier.

"Do you see it?" Azubi dared to ask.

No answer... The rumors must have been true. A ship carrying THAT MAN must have been on its way.

"Fret not, it will be fine. I'm sure of it," she assured him gently.

"Perhaps so..." he softly mumbled.

"Why are you even worried?" her brother interjected as he devoured the plums meant for his father.

The plum basket fell to the ground as Father grabbed Serec by his wrist.

"Gods, I ask you once more. Why did you take my other sons but leave me with this one?"

Father pushed his son forward with momentum so great he lost balance. He cried out when his head landed on the sharp pebbles.

"Tell you what... You shall answer your own question..."

Serec blinked in confusion.

"..or you will spend the next decade in exile."

Realizing Father wasn't making an idle threat, Serec scrambled to get back on his feet. He uncharacteristically thought for a moment. Finally, he concluded:

"You don't think... Would he really...replace you?"

"Why else come here, to this forsaken island?" Father lamented.

"Ever the pessimist... He might have other reasons. Like what if he has come for sis?"

Both men had a good chuckle. Azubi hardly resisted her urge to tackle her brother.

Jesting with my lack of suitors, are you now? That dung pot ought to learn even basic courtesy. Despite having witnessed nearly twenty-two summers, not a single suitor had come to her sight.

Yet, her late mother had been half of her age when she was carried away. The stark contrast haunted her daily. *Why couldn't I inherit any of her charms?*

A large galley revealed itself at a distance; the sovereign signature it proudly wore distinguished it from the dozen smaller merchant vessels accompanying it. The fleet looked like it had seen better days. The long voyage from the East must have been exceptionally harsh.

"Look at that... What an imposing fleet," Serec proudly mocked.

"Those easterners... They don't know how to sail our waters, they never have," Father observed.

Azubi recalled her grandpa, citing the same phrase. Maybe the assumption was as old as the settlers of Ecusveth. *Did it hold any truth?* she wondered. The East certainly had its share of capable sailors... why wouldn't they be able to sail the Western waters? Perhaps, the men of Ecusveth were just over-eager to critique outsiders in something they took so much pride in.

"Bet they wrecked half of their ships," he continued the ridicule.

"Without a doubt. Imagine if we still paid taxes and this is how they were squandered?" Serec said.

"And what would you have done in the Sovereigness' position?" Azubi interloped.

"Absolutely nothing, just like her predecessors. The realm doesn't need us," her brother spouted.

A tall man jumped out of the galley. His azure robe was composed out of the finest silk velvet Azubi had ever seen. A dense but well-pruned mustache covered the smile on his youthful face. Evidently, he also put a lot of effort into grooming his hair. Overjoyed, he wasted no time beginning his speech:

"Humble island folk, you ought to celebrate to your fullest. For centuries, you pitiful people have been neglected. Hence, your land has been overtaken by bandits, wickedness, and decadence. But worry no longer; at last, your gracious monarch has seen reason and appointed me as your new guardian. I will set everything right, I assure you."

To Azubi's surprise, the crowd gathered to meet the stranger and frowned. No fewer than a quarter of them had been taken against their will and brought to Lealma Island in chains. In Azubi's mind, their miserable fate was a direct result of the anarchy that had befallen the western half of the realm. *These people, at least some of them, ought to be cheering for this great man who was bound to change their fortunes.*

"Bulec Fostico is the name bestowed on me. Know it, for it will echo through time and space."

“Regardless, you humble folks might refer to me either as Blessed Savior or Gracious Governor,” Bulec completed his rousing speech.

He stepped forward and offered his hand to her father, who turned it away and instead introduced himself: “Welcome to Lealma Island, o’great magistrate. I’m Fulac, it’s pitiful lord.”

Bulec’s eyes widened; the mockery in his voice was completely lost on him.

“Lord? Surely, you mean vicar?”

Unamusingly, Father signed with a heavy breath.

“No, a lord like my father and his father before him. Though we do descend from vicarial origin,” he continued.

Azubi couldn’t help but question the credibility of her father’s claim. Warlords in Ecusveth were desperate to fabricate a legitimate lineage to cement their rule. The most credible way to foster such credibility was by claiming their ancestry from some ancient vicar. In truth, her grandfather might have been a random bandit who conquered the island and murdered its rightful vicars.

“Oh, I see there is some confusion... You are not—”

“I’m the lord of this island! Regardless of how you Easterners see it,” Fulac blurted. His calm mask slipped; rarely did visitors have the balls to challenge his authority, and when they did, they often did not leave the island alive.

“Easterners, really? That’s what you call us? You equate the good people of Cistaveth with the likes of the Gubaheans?”

“You are both from the East so...” Serec interjected while his father bid his time calming down.

“Son, do I look like a fucking Seluk to you?” Bulec asked sharply.

“I haven’t seen one... So, maybe?” Serec pondered.

“No, I don’t... We noble Cistavethi aren’t tainted with that Seluk blood.”

He will leave this island with me in his arms or he won’t leave at all...

At that moment Azubi gazed into Bulec’s green eyes knew he was going restore order *Such a great man ought to need a worthy companion...*

Outline

Overview

SINGLE paragraph overview

Setting

Characters

who are they? what do they want? why can't they have it? 3-5 paragraphs

Main

Name	Azubi of Lealm
Culture	Ecusvethi
Caste	Petty noble
Bio	A 23-year-old daughter of the Lord of Lealm Island.
Personality	Entitled, cruel, insecure, demanding, arrogant
History	Trauma. Found her mother's corpse mutilated at a young age. Blames the death of her two brothers on her father
Want	Luxury/power
Role	Protagonist, to join Bulec in his journey

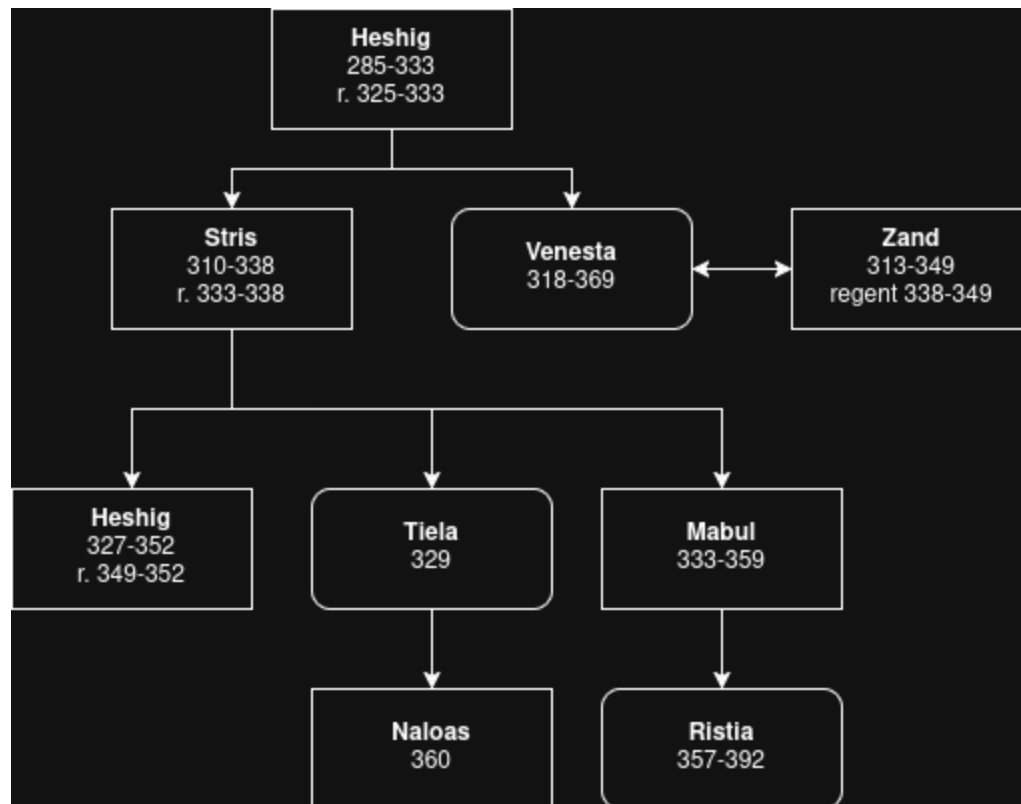
Name	Serec of Lealm
Culture	Ecusvethi
Caste	Petty noble
Bio	A 17-year-old son of the Lord of Lealm Island.
Personality	Lazy
History	
Want	
Role	Protagonist, to join Bulec in his journey

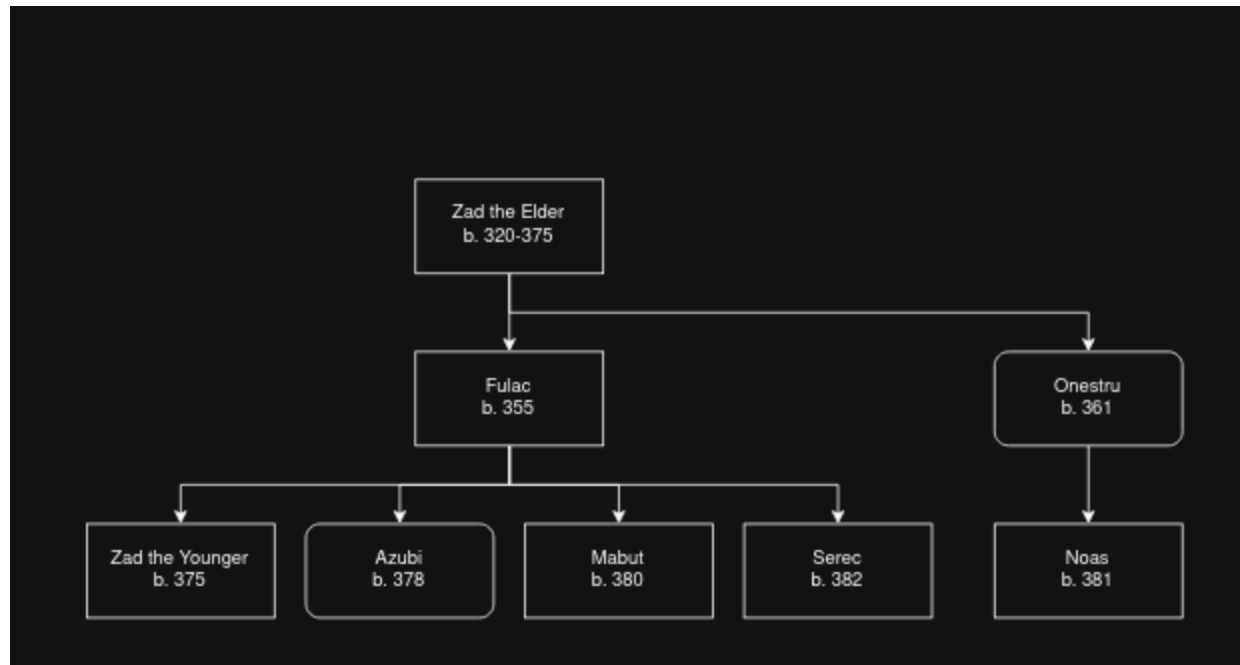
Name	Bulec Fostico
Culture	Cistavethi
Caste	High noble
Bio	A forty-ish war veteran from the east.
Personality	Arrogant, ambitious, self-confident, outspoken
History	His uncle is the consort of the Sovereigness, and his path to power is the result of nepotism.
Want	Glory
Role	Protagonist, to restore the Sovereign's authority in Ecusveth region

Name	Condal the Stable Boy
Culture	Ecusvethi
Caste	Commoner
Bio	Thirty-ish stable boy
Personality	Secretive
History	Descendant of the vicars of Lealm Island. He pretends to be lazy while plotting.
Want	Liberation of the Lealm Island

Timeline

Year	Event
352	Zad the Elder takes over Lealm, founding the 3rd Dynasty of Lealm
355	Fulac is born to Zad the Elder
370	Ristia, a noblewoman from the mainland, is captured by Fulac
375	Zad the Elder dies
	Azubi's oldest brother, Zad the Younger, born to Fulac and Ristia
378	Azubi is born
~380	Azubi's younger brother, Mabut
382	Azubi's youngest brother, Serec is born
399	Zad the Younger dies on his conquest
401	The story begins in the 20th year of Frasha's Reign





Structure

Those with Not Enough

Those with Little

Those with Blind Ambition

1st act

1. Azubi leaves the Keep
2. Azubi passes by Condal
3. Bulec arrives on the Island
4. Azubi sees a vision of the Harpies
5. Condal begins his rebellion
6. Condal begins to burn the Keep

2nd act

1. Azubi arrives in the Town
2. Azubi and Bulec meet
3. Azubi and Bulec travel to the Ruins of Vicar's Palace

3rd act

1. Fulac fights Condal
2. Bulec executes Fulac

Sandbox

Her day brightened when she came across a familiar tree. Some knew it as the Vicar's Tree. Supposedly, the last vicar of the island had been hanged from it. Of course, those were mere rumors. Perhaps they had been entirely fabricated by the bored villagers. Young Azubi had been drawn to its remarkable height. She and her three brothers had competed in climbing it. How she missed two of them. Few could fathom the ambition and valor they had possessed. Had her father been more reasonable, they might still be alive.

The tree's placement here meant she was closer than she had thought. Azubi sighed in relief. There would still be time to reach the Town before the Easterner arrived there. To her best effort, she ran the rest of the way to the Town.

At last, she lumbered into the Southern Thorp. Ten earth lodges, three piers, and a rocky beach between them, that was all there was to see. Strangely, it was exactly as she remembered it, despite not having visited since her mother perished.

How bewildering it was to imagine that without this humble settlement, the keep on the hill might not have been built. More than a century ago, the vicar had ordered the construction of the hill keep to protect the Southern Thorp from the increasing attacks of the rovers. How ironic that such a pragmatic act led to the fall of the vicars years later.

A lone boat rested on a pier. Far from the grand entrance, she had hoped for, but it would have to suffice. She turned her eyes to the three women salting fish on the rocky shore. If there were truly no men around to ferry her, these women had to.

As Azubi approached them, she piqued their curiosity. Azubi felt flattered; such a strange emotion. Few folks were happy to see her. *She was blessing these lowly peasants with her noble presence. Of course, they would be delighted to aid her.*

"Lord's daughter, huh? Haven't seen you in a decade. Did you take a wrong turn?" one of the older women asked in an amusing tone.

Her skin was as dry as the salt she was handling. More ominous characteristic was the many small cracks all around her face. There was also something stranger in her eyes as if they were an endless void that sucked light around her. Out of all the undesirable people Azubi had the misfortune of coming across, these women had to be some of the ugliest. She began to feel disgusted by their mere presence. Could she tolerate these women the entire voyage? Even their breath smelled like a mixture of blood and rotten eggs.

"No, but I need—" Azubi tried.

Glossary

Terms

Term	Explanation
gesith	Thane-in-training. Typically, gesith are men in their teens or twenties.
guardian	Viceroy, a governor of a large region, appointed by the sovereign
lord	Hereditary ruler of a territory
sovereign	The supreme ruler
thane	Veteran warrior. Thanes are capable and heavily armed. They also own land
vicar	A sub-governor of a smaller province appointed by the guardian or elected

Places

Name	Type	Explanation
<i>Lealm Island</i>	island	Small island in the north-west of Ecusveth
<i>Vastaring River</i>	river	A river between Slarid Town and Bacoud Town
<i>Slarid Town</i>	town	Largest town in Lealm, also a port
<i>Bacoud Town</i>	town	A small town north of Slarid

Short stories

Lealm Island

The island remained unsettled until the year 95, when the port town of Lealm was founded by the colonists from the south.

As part of the region of Ecusveth, it fell under its guardian jurisdiction. As the population of the island was insignificant, it required no further output from the guardian, and he allowed the islander to elect their mayor.

However, at some point, pirates took note of the lack of protection on the island and turned it into a pirate haven. As the town lacked defenses, the mayors were helpless in preventing pirates from residing.

mayor (c. 100-)

reeve (c. 150-)

vicars (c. 180-279)

1st lineage (279-325)

2nd lineage (325-352)

3rd lineage (352-PRN)

Zad the Younger (375 - 399)

Background

Zad was the older brother of **Azubi** and was named after his grandfather, who had died a few months before he was born. His father was the lord of the Lealm Island, Fulag.

He accompanied his father on a raid to the mainland at the tender age of 12 (year 387). Where quickly obtained a taste for bloodshed. Zad was unlike his prudent father — he knew no fear and was driven by ambition.

Only three years later (390), he led a raid on his own and achieved great success. He continued raiding annually until the year 394, when he had a falling out with his father, who had grown envious of his son's exploits. Zad was formally exiled for three years; during that time, he served as a mercenary in the south, where he gained new followers.

Invasion of the Mainland (397-398)

In 397, Zad returned to Lealm Island and requested aid from his father. He would carve his own realm on the mainland with or without his help. His father refused and forbade his people from aiding Zad's "fever dream". Yet many gesith followed him regardless. His core followers were:

- Zad's younger brother, **Mabut**, a mere shadow of Zad, but who still aspired to be him
- **Riulag**, the only thane who defied his lord to follow Zad
- **Hucas**, husband of Zad's aunt and senior advisor to Fula

As he departed in the spring of 398, it was the last time his sister Azubi saw him.

With two veteran thanes and 200 gesith under his command, Zad occupied **Bacoud Town** on the mainland. The town stood mere days away from Lealm Island. Fulac though, his son was intentionally humiliating him by targeting the town so close to him.

Battle of Vastaring River (398)

The **Lord of Bacoud** fled to the nearby **Slarid Town**, where he convinced its lord to help him reclaim his seat. The **Lord of Slarid** marched with an army of 500 to confront the raiders. Zad met them at the **Vastaring River**.

While Zad's force was outnumbered, his gesith also had high morale and were more experienced than the Slaridian conscripts. If they could prevent their enemies from crossing, the numerical disadvantage wouldn't matter.

When the Lord of Slarid saw the fierce 200 gesith on the other side of the river, he realized the difficulty. To use numbers to his advantage, he assigned 100 of his troops to the Lord of Bacoud; he would cross the river from another ford while Zad's forces were busy and encircle them.

However, when the battle started and 400 Slaridian charged through the river, Zad realized it was missing men. He then gave Riulag 20 men and asked him to scout upstream for a possible enemy breach. Riulag's party quickly found the Lord of Bacoud's company that had already crossed the river. He had to attack them before those men reached their main force defending the ford, but they were outnumbered.

Instead of directly attacking the Slaridians, he shadowed them from a thick forest until the moment presented itself, and his party ambushed them. Their speed was so swift, the Lord of Bacoud never saw the man who killed him. His sons were too dimwitted to take control of the party and were cut down. Having lost their commanders and unaware of their attacker's true number, the Slaridians dropped their weapons and ran. Only half of the Slaridians made it back. Later, Zad made all 20 gesith into thanes.

Meanwhile, the ford, somehow, Zad's 180 thanes had been able to hold 400 Slaridians off. Though the cost was a third of his force, the Slaridian casualties were three times that. Zad admitted to his troops that their victory was due to luck, and given their losses, they would be unlikely to win another battle.

Unknown to the Slaridians, their own morale was crumbling after the death of the Lord of Bacoud in battle. Many questioned, "What are we even doing here anymore?" But the Lord of Slarid was reluctant to leave Bacoud in the hands of raiders without extracting promises of peace.

Short-lived peace (398-399)

The next morning, Hucas decided to prove his worth. He entered the Slaridian camp and brokered a peace that satisfied both sides temporarily: the Lord of Slarid would recognize Zad as the new Lord of Bacoud Town, and, in return, Zad's brother Mabut would be held as a hostage in Slarid.

This compromise pleased no one. Zad cursed his father's name; had Fulac supported him, they could have won decisively and avoided making concessions. Mabut felt betrayed by his brother, whom he so greatly admired. But no one was more disappointed than the daughter of the slain Lord of Bacoud. Her father and brothers had all been killed by Zad. Now alone in Slarid, she saw Mabut, Zad's brother, as a tool for revenge.

She assumed a false identity and seduced Mabut. Initially planning to murder him, she realized it was even easier to extract information from a depressed, drunken fool. In 398, Mabut, intoxicated, revealed to her how weak Zad's position truly was and how Fulac had refused any aid. She informed the Lord of Slarid, convincing him to launch a fresh attack on Bacoud.

In 399, the Slaridians crossed the Vastaring River uncontested. Zad's forces, still depleted, had not recovered. Zad believed they had only two choices: flee or hold out in Bacoud Town and hope his father would come to their rescue. Zad sent Riulag to plead with Fulac. However, Fulac, instead of helping, imprisoned his former thane and once again refused to support his son. He believed hardship would teach Zad humility and allow Fulac to ransom him after his inevitable capture.

But Zad had no intention of surrendering. After weeks of siege, with no help arriving, he decided to lead a desperate sally to lift the siege. Most of his gesith perished. After the failed sortie, Hucas surrendered Bacoud Town to the Slaridians and returned to Lealm to inform Fulac of his son's fate.

The shock of Zad's death and his own self-blame inflicted a deep wound on Fulac that never healed.

Zad's head was taken to Slarid as a trophy, where the imprisoned Mabut saw the severed head of his brother. Horrified by the realization that his drunken betrayal had led to his beloved brother's death, Mabut took his own life.

Rewrite v3

An end to the madness lay near. Mere weeks ago, rumors had reached her ears: the sovereign had sent a new viceroy to the region. Back then, she couldn't have been more thrilled. At last, someone would vanquish the outlaws, discipline the unruly warlords, and rebuild the ruins. Maybe even this backwater would have its day in the Sun.

At least, that's what she thought before the arrival of the envoy. Not only had he confirmed the rumors, but a message had accompanied him:

Prepare for a grand feast, for the viceroy will soon make his visit.

Even in her wildest dreams, she never foresaw a viceroy ascending on their humble island home. If only her father had shared her enthusiasm, instead of bursting out like a boar that he was. With the envoy's head in his hand, he answered the announcement with a declaration of his own

If there were any justice in the world, he would not get away with it. The viceroy ought to escort her father to the gallows. Gods knew he deserved nothing less for his vile deeds.

Since then, days had passed, and nothing had transpired. Her father's followers had cried out: "That fool must be a craven; we won't be seeing him". If that was true, perhaps it was better that way. Yet, she held onto hope.

One day, she lingered in her bath when commotion erupted from downstairs. What could this be about? Were the rovers back for more bloodshed? Could a single season not go by without an assault on the keep?

"Hem!" she called the slave girl guarding the bath chamber.

Yet, no answer followed. What was that wench doing? No matter, it was probably nothing. She closed her eyes and continued her bath.

When she woke up, the little warmth that water had once had was gone, much like the sounds.