

# PROLOGUE

The prologue opens with Lord Tresting observing his skaa workers toiling under an ash-filled sky, a common occurrence in the Final Empire. Tresting, dressed in fine attire from Luthadel, expresses disdain for the skaa's sluggishness, attributing it to their inherent laziness. His guest, a high-ranking obligator with intricate facial tattoos, notes that Tresting's skaa are more diligent than their urban counterparts. The conversation reveals the brutal efficiency of Tresting's control, including executions of families to prevent runaways, showcasing the oppressive hierarchy of the world.

The obligator, representing the Lord Ruler's authority, inspects Tresting's operations and approves of his harsh methods. Tresting seeks to impress the obligator to advance his standing, particularly in hopes of moving to Luthadel. The obligator hints at Tresting's potential for upward mobility, provided he maintains his productivity. This interaction underscores the bureaucratic and religious role of obligators, who serve as both witnesses and enforcers of the Lord Ruler's will, while also highlighting Tresting's ambition.

A tense moment arises when the obligator questions Tresting about rumors of his dalliances with skaa women. Though Tresting is initially alarmed, the obligator reassures him, stating that his "cleanup" of such indiscretions has satisfied the Canton of Inquisition. The mention of a Steel Inquisitor—a feared enforcer—hints at the darker forces lurking in the empire. Tresting's relief and subsequent pride at the obligator's praise reveal his eagerness to climb the social ladder.

The chapter concludes with Tresting contemplating his future, spurred by the obligator's encouragement. He plans to celebrate by exploiting a young skaa girl and considers pushing his workers harder to accelerate his rise to prominence. The scene reinforces the skaa's dehumanized existence, their silent suffering under the oppressive regime, and Tresting's ruthless ambition. The prologue sets the tone for a

world defined by cruelty, power struggles, and the stark divide between nobility and the subjugated skaa.

