# The Fifth Season

*The Fifth Season* is the first book in N. K. Jemisin’s groundbreaking *Broken Earth* trilogy, a masterpiece that redefines epic fantasy. Set on a supercontinent called the Stillness, where catastrophic climate disasters (known as "Fifth Seasons") regularly devastate civilization, the story follows three intertwined narratives:

1. **Essun**, a woman searching for her missing daughter in a world collapsing into chaos.
2. **Damaya**, a young girl with dangerous powers, taken to be trained by the oppressive Fulcrum.
3. **Syenite**, an ambitious orogene (a person with earth-manipulating abilities) sent on a mission that reveals dark truths about her society.

Jemisin’s worldbuilding is unparalleled—blending geological forces, systemic oppression, and raw human emotion into a narrative that questions power, survival, and what it means to be "other." The novel won the **Hugo Award for Best Novel (2016)**, making Jemisin the first Black author to receive this honor.

With its seismic prose, complex characters, and themes of resilience and rebellion, *The Fifth Season* is a tectonic shift in fantasy literature.

## Chapter 1: Prologue: you are here

The prologue opens with a harrowing personal tragedy: a mother grieving the death of her son, Uche, as the world collapses around her. Numb with loss, she finds bitter solace in the thought that he is now free, though she acknowledges he never truly was in life. This intimate ending parallels the larger catastrophe about to unfold, setting a

tone of cyclical despair and resilience. The mother’s sorrow is framed as familiar, hinting at a world where endings are recurrent and survival is a weary habit.

The narrative shifts to the broader context of the land called the Stillness, a continent marked by geological instability and ironic naming. It introduces Yumenes, the oldest and most magnificent city, once the heart of a fading empire. Unlike other settlements, Yumenes thrives despite the land’s volatility, its daring architecture symbolizing human audacity. The city’s grandeur, from its obsidian Black Star to its amber-preserved emperor, underscores a civilization that prizes bravery over practicality, even as it teeters on the brink of collapse.

A pivotal figure emerges: a man standing near Yumenes, acutely aware of the city’s pulse yet forever separate from its people. His sensory connection to the land and its inhabitants contrasts with his profound isolation. In a conversation with a stone-like companion, he reflects on the permanence of stonelore and the safety of loving something unchanging. His loneliness and resolve hint at an impending, transformative act, one rooted in absolute, unyielding principles.

The chapter closes with the man’s forced smile and cryptic words, suggesting a facade masking deeper intentions. His companion, a stone eater mimicking human form, embodies the uncanny and ancient forces at play. The prologue masterfully intertwines personal and planetary cataclysms, foreshadowing a story where endings are beginnings, and the lines between freedom, control, and survival blur inextricably.

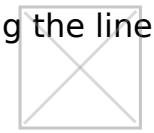
# Chapter 2: you, at the end

The chapter introduces Essun, an orogene living in disguise as an ordinary woman in the town of Tirimo. For ten years, she has maintained a quiet life as a teacher and the wife of a local stoneknapper, Jija, blending into the background. However, her fragile stability shatters when she returns home to find her son, Uche, brutally murdered and her daughter, Nassun, missing. Overwhelmed by grief, Essun enters a state of emotional shutdown, spending two days in numb detachment beside Uche’s body, barely attending to basic needs like eating or drinking. The townsfolk remain unaware of her turmoil until Lerna, a local doctor, intervenes.

Lerna discovers Essun in her catatonic state and gently guides her to his home, offering care and a safe space to rest. Essun’s trauma manifests in fragmented thoughts and avoidance of reality, such as refusing to acknowledge Uche’s death by correcting her tense when referring to him. Lerna’s patience and quiet support provide a temporary anchor, though Essun’s grief resurfaces in a violent nightmare where she relives Uche’s murder at Jija’s hands. The dream’s irrationality—Jija kicking instead of punching—highlights her fractured psyche. Lerna administers a sedative to calm her, but the emotional wounds remain raw.

As Essun gradually regains awareness, Lerna informs her of a catastrophic seismic event to the north, which has sent refugees flooding toward Tirimo. The sulfurous air and distant devastation hint at an unprecedented disaster, one Essun instinctively understands is linked to her orogenic abilities. Her latent power briefly surfaces when she recalls diverting the seismic force to protect Uche’s body, though the memory is fragmented. The chapter underscores the duality of her identity: a grieving mother and a powerful orogene, both roles colliding in the wake of personal and global catastrophe.

The chapter’s tone is haunting and introspective, immersing the reader in Essun’s dissociative grief while foreshadowing larger societal collapse. Her struggle to reconcile her past, her abilities, and her loss mirrors the broader upheaval of the world. Lerna’s compassion offers a fleeting respite, but the unresolved mystery of Nassun’s disappearance and Jija’s betrayal looms, setting the stage for Essun’s journey ahead. The narrative’s second-person perspective intensifies the intimacy of her suffering, blurring the line between protagonist and reader.



# Chapter 2: you, at the end

The chapter introduces Essun, an orogene living a quiet life in the town of Tirimo, where she conceals her true nature. As a teacher and the wife of a local stoneknapper, Jija, she blends into the background, preferring anonymity. Her life shatters when she returns home to find her son, Uche, brutally murdered and her daughter, Nassun, missing. Overwhelmed by grief, Essun shuts down, spending two days in a catatonic state beside Uche’s body, unable to process the horror. The townspeople, unaware of her turmoil, continue their lives until Lerna, a local doctor, intervenes.

Lerna discovers Essun’s trauma and gently guides her to his home, offering care and a safe space to rest. Essun, numb and detached, complies without resistance, her mind refusing to confront the reality of her loss. Lerna’s kindness contrasts with the brutality of her situation, highlighting her isolation. Even in his care, Essun’s grief manifests in fragmented thoughts and a haunting dream where she relives Uche’s death, blurring the lines between memory and nightmare. The dream forces her to confront the violence inflicted by Jija, though her mind distorts the details to shield her from the full truth.

As Essun begins to surface from her stupor, Lerna informs her of a catastrophic seismic event to the north, which has sent refugees fleeing toward Tirimo. The sulfurous air and the influx of survivors hint at a disaster far worse than a typical earthquake. Essun, though barely functional, intuitively senses the magnitude of the event, recalling how she unconsciously diverted the seismic force to protect Uche’s body. This revelation underscores her latent power and the broader implications of the catastrophe, which may be tied to her personal tragedy.

The chapter closes with a sense of impending doom, as the personal and global scales of disaster converge. Essun’s grief is mirrored by the world’s upheaval, suggesting her story is intertwined with larger forces. Lerna’s care provides temporary solace, but the

unresolved mystery of Nassun’s disappearance and the looming threat of further chaos leave Essun—and the reader—on the brink of an uncertain future. The narrative blends intimate trauma with apocalyptic foreshadowing, setting the stage for Essun’s journey.

# Chapter 3: Damaya, in winters past

The chapter opens with Damaya, a young girl, hiding in a pile of straw in a barn, clinging to the memory of a quilt made by her late great-grandmother. The warmth and scent of the straw evoke nostalgia, but the reality of her situation is stark—she has been abandoned by her family and will never return to her old life. As she listens to her mother and a stranger approach, Damaya's resentment toward her family surfaces, particularly her hatred for the nickname "DamaDama" and the false affection it represents. The stranger's unfamiliar accent and jingling presence hint at his role as a potential "child-buyer," sparking Damaya's fear and shame.

The interaction between Damaya's mother and the stranger reveals the cruelty of her family's treatment. The man's polite yet pointed questions about Damaya's living conditions subtly rebuke her mother, exposing the neglect Damaya has endured. Damaya oscillates between anger and self-loathing, torn between wanting to spite her parents and feeling guilty for her hatred. The stranger's unusual footsteps, which Damaya can sense but not fully perceive, add an air of mystery to his character, setting him apart from anyone she has encountered before.

As the stranger climbs to the loft where Damaya hides, he speaks gently, assuring her she need not fear her mother. Despite knowing the dangers of child-buyers, Damaya feels an inexplicable trust toward him, drawn to his kindness. His physical appearance—pale skin, flat black hair, and nearly colorless "icewhite" eyes—marks him as an outsider, yet his demeanor disarms her. When he smiles, Damaya instinctively smiles back, defying her own caution. This moment underscores her desperate need for compassion amid the betrayal she has suffered.

The chapter concludes with the stranger addressing Damaya by her despised nickname, prompting her to correct him. His graceful acknowledgment and extended hand suggest a pivotal shift in her fate. Damaya's willingness to engage with him,

despite her fears, hints at the beginning of a new, uncertain journey. The encounter leaves readers questioning the stranger’s true intentions and the broader implications of Damaya’s unique abilities, which have set her apart from her family and community.

# Chapter 3: Damaya, in winters past

The chapter opens with Damaya, a young girl, hiding in a pile of straw in a barn, reminiscing about a quilt made by her late great-grandmother. The quilt symbolizes comfort and love, contrasting sharply with her current situation—abandoned by her family and trapped in the barn. Damaya’s mother arrives with a stranger, a man with an unfamiliar accent, who is implied to be a "child-buyer." Damaya overhears their conversation, filled with tension and shame, as her mother dismisses her needs and the stranger subtly reprimands her neglect. The scene highlights Damaya’s isolation and her mother’s betrayal.

Damaya’s internal conflict is palpable as she oscillates between hatred for her parents and self-loathing for her rebellious thoughts. She resents her mother’s hypocritical affection and the nickname "DamaDama," which feels like a cruel joke. The stranger’s presence unnerves her, yet his calm demeanor and quiet authority intrigue her. Damaya’s ability to "sess" footsteps—a rare sensitivity to vibrations—reveals her unique nature, hinting at why she’s being sold. The stranger’s footsteps, however, defy her perception, adding to his mystique and unsettling her further.

As the stranger approaches, Damaya’s fear and curiosity clash. He addresses her gently, promising protection from her mother, which momentarily disarms her. Despite knowing the dangers of child-buyers, Damaya is drawn to his kindness. Her use name, "Strongback," is another source of resentment, symbolizing her family’s low status and expendability. The stranger’s appearance—pale skin, black hair, and eerie icewhite eyes—marks him as an outsider, yet his smile inexplicably earns her trust. This moment underscores Damaya’s desperation for compassion amid her abandonment.

The chapter ends with Damaya emerging from the straw, cautiously engaging with the stranger. His respectful address and offer of help contrast starkly with her mother’s cruelty, leaving her torn between suspicion and hope. The stranger’s enigmatic nature

and Damaya’s immediate, irrational trust in him set the stage for her uncertain future. The scene encapsulates themes of betrayal, survival, and the search for belonging, as Damaya stands on the precipice of a life-altering transition.

# Chapter 4: you’re on your way

The chapter follows a grieving mother grappling with the aftermath of her son Uche’s death and the disappearance of her daughter Nassun. She resolves to remain the mother Nassun loved until she can properly say goodbye, even as she acknowledges the need to shed her former, subdued self. The world around her is in turmoil: a catastrophic seismic event has spared her town, Tirimo, but refugees and sulfurous winds hint at impending disaster. The community, led by Headman Rask, is on edge, preparing for the inevitable declaration of Seasonal Law, while the mother quietly plans her next moves.

As denial fades, fear takes hold among the townspeople, who may soon seek scapegoats. The mother methodically prepares for her departure, sorting through a survival pack and discarding sentimental but impractical items like Nassun’s outgrown clothing and moldy food. She keeps essentials, including money and a knife, while steeling herself for the confrontation with her husband, Jija, who killed Uche. Her focus is on finding Nassun, though her rage simmers beneath the surface, threatening to overwhelm her.

The mother’s grief and anger occasionally erupt, but she forces herself to maintain composure. She notices the environmental decay—sulfur in the air, the ominous sky—and senses the seismic unrest. Despite the lockdown and heightened vigilance, she maneuvers through town, leveraging her familiarity with its rhythms to avoid suspicion. Her isolation and grief are palpable as she avoids the spot where Uche died and suppresses memories of her fractured family life.

The chapter closes with the town’s collective anxiety manifesting in organized preparations: livestock pens are built, and residents busy themselves with tasks to stave off panic. The mother, however, remains detached, her mind fixed on survival and vengeance. Her quiet determination contrasts with the communal frenzy,

underscoring her resolve to leave Tirimo behind and confront the horrors that lie ahead. The stage is set for her journey into a world unraveling at the seams.

# Chapter 5: Syenite, cut and polished

Syenite, a skilled orogene with four rings, masks her frustration behind a polite demeanor during a meeting with her senior, Feldspar. Feldspar assigns her a seemingly trivial mission—clearing a coral reef—which Syenite considers beneath her abilities. The conversation is laced with unspoken tension, as both women adhere to the Fulcrum's strict rules of professionalism. Feldspar hints that the assignment is a pretext, subtly acknowledging the underlying politics while maintaining the facade of mentorship. Syenite begrudgingly accepts the task, finding solace in the fact that her mentor is a ten-ringer, a rare and respected rank.

Feldspar reveals that Syenite's mentor, Alabaster, has recently returned from a demanding mission and will accompany her to Allia. The journey is framed as leisurely, though Syenite suspects ulterior motives. Feldspar's brief irritation at the quartent governor's demands hints at the bureaucratic pressures within the Fulcrum. The discussion underscores the rigid hierarchy and expectations placed on orogenes, who must project competence and control at all times. Syenite's shock at learning Alabaster travels without a Guardian highlights the privileges granted to higher-ranked orogenes, further emphasizing the disparity in their status.

Syenite prepares to meet Alabaster, but Feldspar warns her that he can refuse the mission—a rare concession that puzzles Syenite. Feldspar's cryptic remark about having six children subtly reveals her personal stake in the matter, implying the assignment is tied to broader political machinations. The exchange leaves Syenite wary but resigned, recognizing the unspoken rules of their world. The chapter underscores the Fulcrum's oppressive culture, where power dynamics and unspoken truths dictate actions beneath a veneer of civility.

As Syenite departs, she observes the Fulcrum's sprawling Ring Garden, a privilege reserved for ringed orogenes. The scene contrasts the garden's tranquility with the

underlying tension of the institution, where Guardians monitor even casual interactions. A brief encounter with a distracted junior and a watchful Guardian reinforces the ever-present surveillance. The chapter closes with Syenite moving on, her thoughts lingering on the grotesque parallels between the Fulcrum and a child in the womb—a metaphor reflecting her stifled autonomy and the institution’s oppressive control.

# Chapter 6: you’re not alone

The chapter opens with the protagonist, exhausted and burdened by the weight of her actions, reflecting on the toll of her orogenic powers. She describes the physical and emotional strain of controlling her abilities, which demand immense effort to avoid catastrophic destruction. After walking for hours to dissipate her energy, she settles in a secluded field, avoiding a fire to remain hidden. The eerie glow in the northern sky, likely from a volcanic rift, serves as a grim reminder of the ongoing Fifth Season, a time of environmental chaos and societal collapse. Her thoughts drift to her husband, Jija, whose violent actions have shattered their family, leaving her to navigate this broken world alone.

As night falls, the protagonist observes the signs of impending doom—red-lit clouds, darkened highroads, and the absence of normalcy. She eats sparingly from her dwindling supplies, recalling the roadhouse where she encountered other survivors, all grappling with the reality of their dire circumstances. These people, marked by grief and desperation, embody the stonelore’s warnings about the brutality required to survive a Season. Yet, the protagonist’s personal tragedy—her child’s death at Jija’s hands—defies even these grim expectations, leaving her adrift in a world that no longer makes sense. Her journey southward is both a physical and emotional escape, driven by a mix of survival instinct and unresolved trauma.

The protagonist’s solitude is abruptly interrupted by the appearance of a young boy named Hoa, who emerges silently from the darkness. Covered in dirt and seemingly alone, he strikes up a tentative conversation, asking to stay with her. His presence is both unsettling and poignant, evoking memories of her own children. The protagonist’s initial wariness—fueled by tales of feral, dangerous children—gives way to curiosity as she assesses his harmless demeanor. Despite the strangeness of his sudden appearance, she acknowledges the unpredictability of life during a Season, where

even the most unlikely encounters can occur.

The chapter closes with a sense of uneasy tension as the protagonist and Hoa exchange cautious words. His simplicity and vulnerability contrast sharply with the harshness of their surroundings, hinting at a potential connection or conflict. The protagonist’s internal struggle—between her desire for isolation and the lingering instinct to protect—mirrors the broader themes of survival and humanity in a collapsing world. The encounter leaves the reader questioning Hoa’s true nature and the role he might play in the protagonist’s journey, setting the stage for further developments in the narrative.

# Chapter 7: Damaya, grinding to a halt

The chapter follows Damaya’s journey with Schaffa as they travel from Palela to Brevard, marking her first experience beyond her hometown. The road is filled with novelties, from endless fields to dense forests, and Damaya struggles to hide her awe, though Schaffa finds her reactions endearing. Brevard overwhelms her with its towering buildings and bustling nightlife, a stark contrast to her quiet village life. Schaffa guides her through the unfamiliar, taking her to a safer inn where Damaya is astonished by the foreign comforts, from communal meals to large beds, all while grappling with her sense of displacement.

During their stay, Damaya witnesses Schaffa’s restless sleep, torn between concern and fear of angering him. His sudden nightmare terrifies her, but when she tentatively asks if he’s awake, he dismisses it as snoring, leaving her unsettled. The next morning, Brevard appears less intimidating in daylight, its ordinary routines mirroring her hometown’s, which helps her adjust. The familiarity of daily chores—water carriers, butter churners—reassures her that Brevard’s people are not so different from those she knows, easing her initial culture shock.

As they journey further into the shatterlands, Schaffa explains the volatile geology, pointing out newly formed rocks from a past earthquake. Damaya senses the land’s fragility, likening it to a cracked eggshell, and unconsciously tunes into the earth’s energy. Schaffa warns her against this, revealing his awareness of her latent orogenic abilities. His disappointment in her lack of control hints at the dangers of her untrained power, though he softens by offering a story to distract her, shifting from disciplinarian to mentor.

Schaffa begins a tale about Shemshena, an ancient orogene named Misalem who attempted to assassinate an emperor, highlighting the historical lack of training for orogenes. His frustration with Damaya’s ignorance of such lore underscores the

cultural divide between rural and urban societies. The story serves as both a lesson and a warning, foreshadowing Damaya’s own path as an orogene. The chapter closes with Schaffa’s blend of stern guidance and paternal care, leaving Damaya caught between curiosity and the weight of her emerging identity.

# Chapter 8: you plus one is two

The chapter opens with the protagonist waking up to continue their journey south, accompanied by a mysterious boy named Hoa. Covered in mud and debris, Hoa is initially perceived as a nuisance, but his odd behavior and appearance—such as his icewhite eyes and unnaturally cheerful demeanor—pique the protagonist's curiosity. Despite his evasive answers about his origins and lack of basic knowledge about his identity, the protagonist decides to keep him with them, driven by a sense of responsibility toward the child. Hoa’s unsettling yet childlike qualities create an air of mystery, leaving the protagonist torn between suspicion and compassion.

As they travel, the protagonist observes Hoa’s peculiar traits more closely. He is small for his assumed age, with pale skin suggesting distant origins, and his icewhite eyes mark him as unusual. His cheerful disposition contrasts starkly with the grim surroundings of ashfall and post-earthquake devastation. The protagonist speculates about his background, considering possibilities like comm-changers or orphanhood, but Hoa’s lies and odd behavior make it difficult to draw conclusions. His actions, such as rummaging through the protagonist’s belongings without permission, add to the tension, yet his vulnerability keeps the protagonist from abandoning him.

The journey along the Imperial Road reveals a world in turmoil, with displaced people and damaged landscapes. Other travelers react warily to the protagonist and Hoa, reinforcing their isolation. The protagonist’s practical concerns—such as finding clothing and boots for Hoa—highlight their reluctant caretaker role. A moment of tension arises when Hoa falls into a creek, refusing the protagonist’s help, which briefly sours their interaction. Despite this, the protagonist remains determined to find a safe place for Hoa, possibly in one of the comms along the road, though the boy’s enigmatic nature complicates matters.

The chapter ends with the protagonist preparing to wash Hoa in a creek, a task that underscores their uneasy alliance. Hoa’s passive compliance and strange demeanor continue to unsettle the protagonist, who oscillates between irritation and protectiveness. The ash-covered landscape and the looming uncertainty of their journey mirror the protagonist’s internal conflict—balancing survival with the moral weight of caring for a child who may not be what he seems. The chapter leaves readers questioning Hoa’s true nature and the implications of his presence in the protagonist’s life.

# Chapter 9: Syenite on the highroad

In this chapter, Syenite and her mentor Alabaster travel along the Yumenes–Allia Highroad, a meticulously constructed route designed for efficiency and safety. Syenite initially finds Alabaster frustrating as he frequently dozes off, leaving her to navigate and manage their journey. However, she eventually notices his constant, subtle quelling of microseismic activity in the surrounding area. This puzzles her, as their training emphasizes redirecting seismic energy rather than suppressing it, which could lead to greater instability. The highroad itself is monotonous, with few travelers and little interaction, leaving Syenite bored and irritable.

Syenite confronts Alabaster about his actions, and he reveals he is easing the burden on node maintainers—orogenes stationed in remote outposts to stabilize regions. These maintainers work in isolation, often assigned to the role due to limited control despite their power. Syenite, who has never visited a node, dismisses the idea of assisting them, joking that they might appreciate the distraction. Alabaster’s reaction is unexpectedly cold, and he criticizes her ignorance, insisting all orogenes should understand the nodes’ significance. His use of the derogatory term "rogga" shocks her, as it contrasts sharply with the Fulcrum’s formal language.

Alabaster challenges Syenite to contribute by quelling microshakes herself, which angers her initially. She resists, viewing the task as pointless and exhausting, but then reconsidersthis when she realizes his fatigue stems from this effort. Recognizing the importance of solidarity among orogenes, she reluctantly agrees to help, though she still sees it as a tedious diversion. Alabaster’s demeanor softens slightly at her acquiescence, surprising her with a rare smile.

The chapter highlights the tension between Syenite’s pragmatic, self-interested perspective and Alabaster’s broader, more altruistic approach to their abilities. Their interactions reveal deeper conflicts about duty, isolation, and the ethical

responsibilities of orogenes. The highroad’s dullness contrasts with the underlying seismic instability of the world, mirroring Syenite’s growing awareness of the unseen burdens carried by those like Alabaster and the node maintainers.

# Chapter 22: nterlude

The chapter "Interlude" highlights the gaps in perception and knowledge among the inhabitants of the Stillness, a world marked by geological instability. It points out that while islands exist, they are rarely discussed because their transient nature—formed and destroyed by volcanic activity and tsunamis—makes them insignificant in the grand scale of planetary time. This oversight mirrors humanity’s broader tendency to overlook ephemeral phenomena, focusing instead on immediate survival. The text suggests that such omissions are inevitable, as humans are themselves fleeting in the face of geological forces.

The narrative further explores the absence of discourse about other continents, despite their plausible existence. The dangers of seafaring, including massive tsunamis and limited resources, deter exploration, leading people to accept the myth that no other landmasses exist. This uncritical acceptance of inherited lore underscores a reluctance to question or venture beyond known boundaries. The chapter critiques this passive adherence to tradition, implying that fear and practicality constrain the collective imagination, leaving vast possibilities unexplored.

Similarly, the people of the Stillness pay little attention to celestial objects, despite the active and crowded sky. Their focus remains earthbound, noticing only the most obvious phenomena like stars and comets while missing deeper cosmic patterns. This selective awareness reflects a broader human tendency to prioritize immediate, tangible concerns over abstract or distant wonders. The text suggests that such limitations are inherent to human nature, as people cannot miss what they have never conceived or imagined.

The chapter concludes by hinting at the existence of other intelligent beings beyond humankind, implying that their perspectives might fill the gaps in human understanding. This subtle revelation challenges the reader to consider what else

might be overlooked in the Stillness—and by extension, in our own world. The interlude serves as a meditation on the boundaries of perception and the unseen forces shaping both the planet and its inhabitants.

# Chapter 11: Syenite among the enemy

Syenite and Alabaster arrive in Allia, a coastal city built within a collapsed caldera, after a week of travel. Despite their black Fulcrum uniforms drawing hostile glares from locals, they secure lodging at a sturdily built but overpriced inn, using their ample provisions to placate the proprietor. The pair also trade Alabaster’s injured horse for a spirited mare, adding a touch of humor to their journey. The chapter highlights the tension between orogenes and the general populace, as well as the privileges granted to them by the Fulcrum, which allow them to navigate such hostility with relative ease.

Allia’s grandiose main gates, made of impractical chromium steel, symbolize the city’s newfound wealth and lack of foresight, contrasting sharply with Yumenes’ more functional design. Syenite notes the lax discipline of the gate crew, who barely acknowledge their arrival, further emphasizing the city’s disorganization. The governor’s mansion, adorned with excessive Yumenescene architectural flourishes and painted bright yellow, strikes Syenite as absurdly ostentatious for a backwater region. These details underscore the theme of misplaced priorities and the fragility of human constructions in a world prone to catastrophic Seasons.

Upon arriving at the mansion, Syenite and Alabaster are met by Asael Leadership Allia, a deputy governor who chastises them for their tardiness. Alabaster, however, deliberately provokes her by questioning her authority and feigning ignorance of her role. His sarcastic remarks about their inferior status as orogenes, despite their critical mission, reveal his simmering resentment toward the Leadership caste. Syenite, though initially confused, quickly aligns with his defiance, showcasing their shared frustration with the societal hierarchies that demean them.

The chapter culminates in a tense exchange, with Alabaster’s thinly veiled contempt pushing Asael to the brink. His mocking tone and exaggerated politeness highlight the power dynamics at play, as the orogenes wield their indispensable skills while being

treated as lesser. Syenite’s internal observations—such as recognizing Alabaster’s fury by his flashing teeth—add depth to their relationship and the chapter’s underlying tension. The scene sets the stage for further conflict, emphasizing the systemic prejudice orogenes face even when their abilities are vital to survival.

# Chapter 12: you walk beside the beast

The chapter delves into Essun’s internal struggle as she grapples with her fractured identity and the weight of motherhood. Despite considering reinventing herself to cope with her trauma, she resolves to remain Essun for the sake of her daughter, Nassun. She acknowledges the broken pieces of her psyche, forced together by sheer willpower, and accepts the necessity of enduring her pain. Her determination to survive is driven by the hope that Nassun might still be alive, even as she navigates a world collapsing into chaos.

Essun and her young companion, Hoa, take refuge at a crowded roadhouse, a neutral ground amid the escalating horrors of the Fifth Season. The atmosphere is tense, with travelers avoiding interaction out of mutual fear. Exhausted and unprepared for the harsh realities of survival, Essun struggles to adapt, relying on Hoa to share watch duties. Their fragile peace is shattered when screams erupt in the camp, prompting a frantic escape into the ash-covered plains. The chaos underscores the pervasive terror of the Season, where danger is omnipresent and trust is scarce.

After fleeing, Essun and Hoa confront the aftermath of their abrupt departure. Essun realizes they must return to the roadhouse for supplies, particularly water, despite the risks. Hoa suggests an alternative—retreating to a safer location—but Essun’s obsession with finding Nassun overrides practicality. Her fear for Nassun’s safety under her abusive father’s care fuels her reckless decisions, revealing the depth of her maternal desperation. Hoa’s quiet concern contrasts with Essun’s single-minded focus, highlighting her emotional isolation.

The chapter culminates in Essun’s grim resolve to reclaim the roadhouse by force if necessary. Her thoughts betray a hardening resolve, as she embraces the ruthless potential of her orogenic abilities. The roadhouse symbolizes both survival and defiance, a small but critical battleground in her larger quest. Essun’s willingness to

confront any obstacle, no matter how trivial, reflects her transformation into a figure of relentless determination, driven by love and vengeance in equal measure.

# Chapter 13: Damaya at the fulcrum of it all

The chapter details Damaya's structured and regimented life at the Fulcrum, a training facility for young orogenes. Each day begins at dawn, with the grits—trainees like Damaya—following a strict routine of waking, showering, and dressing under the watchful eyes of instructors. The Fulcrum's amenities, such as hot showers, are a novelty for Damaya, who comes from a rural background. The instructors enforce discipline through rigorous inspections, punishing infractions like uncleanliness or poor bed-making with cold showers or physical discipline. The harsh treatment is justified as necessary to mold the grits into acceptable representatives of orogeny, a power society views as dangerous and cursed.

Damaya reflects on the unfairness of being judged collectively for the actions of others, given the diverse backgrounds of the grits. However, she internalizes the Fulcrum's ethos, accepting that the world is inherently unjust for orogenes. She strives to conform, finding solace in routine and perfection to avoid punishment. The chapter highlights the psychological conditioning at play, as Damaya recalls the pain of past lessons to stay compliant. The Fulcrum's rigid structure serves to suppress individuality, reinforcing the idea that orogenes must be controlled to be safe.

Academic training follows the morning routine, with lectures and oral examinations designed to test the grits under pressure. Damaya excels in answering questions about orogeny and stonelore, earning approval from her instructor. The classroom environment is tense, with mistakes leading to menial tasks like cleaning slateboards. The instructors' blend of humor and severity creates a paradoxical atmosphere, where the grits laugh nervously to relieve stress. This segment underscores the Fulcrum's dual focus on intellectual and emotional conditioning, preparing the grits for a life of service and scrutiny.

Lunch offers a brief respite, with the grits gathering in an open-air court to enjoy abundant, varied meals. Despite the communal setting, many grits, including Damaya, sit alone, their isolation reflecting the trauma of their pasts or the weight of their conditioning. The chapter ends with a glimpse of the grits' physical and emotional scars, hinting at the broader struggles of orogenes in a hostile world. Damaya's journey at the Fulcrum is one of survival, adaptation, and the gradual erosion of her individuality in the face of systemic control.

# Chapter 14: Syenite finds a new toy

In this chapter, Syenite, an orogene with four rings, meets with Asael, a deputy governor, to discuss clearing a harbor blockage. Syenite explains that her senior colleague, Alabaster, is ill and unable to assist, which prompts Asael to question her competence. Syenite responds by detailing her past achievements, including a precise demolition mission, to assert her capability. The tension between them is palpable, as Asael's skepticism and subtle condescension hint at the broader prejudice against orogenes in their society.

Asael attempts to negotiate payment, suggesting Allia shouldn't pay for two orogenes since Alabaster isn't working. Syenite dismisses this, explaining that Alabaster's presence—even from a distance—is essential for mentorship and oversight. She emphasizes his superior skill, noting he could intervene remotely if needed. Her tone grows sharper as she highlights the disrespectful treatment she and Alabaster have faced, subtly warning Asael against underestimating them. The conversation reveals Syenite's growing frustration with the stills' (non-orogenes) ingrained bias.

Syenite shifts tactics, questioning why the governor hasn't met with them and implying a delay in their work. Asael's dismissive attitude provokes Syenite to confront her directly, comparing their treatment to how other skilled professionals would be received. She points out the lack of basic courtesy, such as a handshake or offering safe (a gesture of hospitality), and challenges Asael's hypocrisy. The deputy governor's flustered response culminates in her calling Syenite a "rogga"—a slur for orogenes—exposing her true feelings.

The chapter ends with Syenite walking out, refusing to proceed until the governor meets with them. She leverages the ambiguity of their contract to pressure Asael, bluffing about the timeline for completing the job. The encounter underscores the systemic discrimination orogenes face and Syenite's determination to demand respect,

even if it means delaying the mission. Her cold, calculated anger reflects her awareness of how easily her actions could be misconstrued as monstrous, further highlighting the precarious position of orogenes in this world.

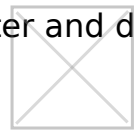
# Chapter 15: you’re on the trail

The chapter opens with a reflective moment, emphasizing the protagonist's duality as both a "monster" and someone capable of greatness. The narrative then shifts to the introduction of Tonkee, a commless geomest who joins the protagonist and Hoa on their journey. Tonkee is eccentric, openly curious about Hoa’s mysterious nature, and unapologetically crude in her behavior. Her background hints at a fall from grace, having trained at the prestigious Seventh University, though her current lifestyle is far removed from that world. The group takes shelter in her cave home, a chaotic yet functional space filled with scavenged items, where Tonkee’s unabashed demeanor and unconventional habits are on full display.

The journey south continues, with the ashfall growing heavier, forcing the travelers to wear masks for protection. The masks anonymize everyone, blending the group into the faceless masses, which the protagonist finds comforting. As the days pass, the roads thin, leaving only those without comms or homes to return to, including injured Equatorials who are slowly succumbing to their wounds. The protagonist observes the growing tension among these displaced people, who are forming new tribal bonds marked by remnants of their former lives. These subtle signs of exclusion highlight the protagonist’s outsider status, though the situation remains manageable for now.

A conversation with a group of displaced Equatorials reveals the human toll of the geological disaster. One woman, a Breeder, recounts the destruction of her city, Alebid, and the loss of its vibrant art scene. Her story underscores the stark contrast between the abstract knowledge of catastrophe and its visceral, personal impact. The group’s guarded demeanor and symbolic clothing choices signal their emerging solidarity, which excludes the protagonist. This encounter reinforces the theme of survival in a fractured world, where old hierarchies are crumbling, and new alliances are forming.

The chapter closes with a sense of unease as the protagonist navigates a landscape of dwindling resources and shifting social dynamics. Hoa’s enigmatic nature remains a point of tension, as his refusal to explain himself strains their relationship. The protagonist’s own identity as an orogene—officially deemed non-human—adds another layer of complexity to their interactions. Despite the challenges, the group presses on, their journey a microcosm of the broader struggle for survival in a world increasingly defined by disaster and division.



# Chapter 16: Syenite breaks her toys

Syenite and Alabaster, two orogenes, receive a cryptic telegram from Yumenes instructing them to remain in Allia, leaving Syenite frustrated and restless. Their contract with the local comm is complete, and they are now paying for their own lodging. Syenite is agitated by the delay, while Alabaster remains nonchalant, suggesting they enjoy the unexpected downtime. Their dynamic is tense; Syenite resents his calm demeanor, and their banter reveals their contrasting personalities. Despite her irritation, she acknowledges the coastal comm's comforts—mild weather, affordable food, and the ocean's beauty—though she remains unsettled by the uncertainty of their situation.

The chapter delves into Syenite's confusion about why the Fulcrum has left them in Allia. She suspects it might be punishment for discovering a floating obelisk during a routine job, an event no one could have anticipated. Alabaster theorizes they're being kept nearby for potential negotiations with geomests and other scholars flocking to study the obelisk. The discovery has drawn widespread attention, filling the city with experts and charlatans alike. Yet, Syenite feels sidelined, as no one has sought her expertise beyond superficial interviews, which contradicts her expectations of the Fulcrum's usual protocols.

A deeper tension arises from Syenite's secret connection to the obelisks, a power she's been warned not to discuss. Alabaster insists she keep this ability hidden, fearing the consequences if others learn of it. His refusal to engage in further conversation about it only fuels her frustration. This secrecy, combined with her growing distrust of the Fulcrum's motives, leaves her feeling isolated. The chapter hints at larger political machinations, as Syenite wonders why the Guardians—typically involved in such matters—have shown no interest in her.

The chapter closes with Syenite’s decision to take a walk to clear her mind, and Alabaster insists on accompanying her for safety. Their exchange underscores the lingering threat of the attempted poisoning Alabaster survived, which neither fully understands. Syenite prefers to blame incompetence, while Alabaster suspects darker intentions. As they head toward the harbor, the unresolved tensions between them and the broader mysteries of their world linger, setting the stage for further conflict and discovery.

# Chapter 17: you’re among friends

The chapter begins with the protagonist arriving at an unexpected and unsettling location referred to as "the place with all the orogenes." The town is abandoned, lacks defensive walls, and displays no signs of typical community structures like storefronts or fields. The buildings are haphazardly styled, contradicting the uniformity usually seen in comms, which heightens the protagonist's unease. The absence of people and the town's disorganized layout suggest it is either hiding something or has been hastily deserted, leaving the group wary as they explore.

As the group moves through the empty streets, they notice further oddities, such as a recently dead garden and well-maintained buildings, hinting at recent habitation. Tonkee, armed with hidden knives, and Hoa, inscrutable as ever, remain on high alert. The protagonist refrains from drawing a weapon, aware that orogenic abilities would be their only defense against potential threats. The tension builds as they question why the townspeople are hiding and how they could have detected the group's arrival amid the ashfall.

The scene shifts when three women emerge from a building, one armed with a crossbow and another, Ykka, who immediately stands out due to her commanding presence and striking appearance. Ykka's confidence and self-assured demeanor, unusual for an orogene, unsettles the protagonist. She introduces herself as "Ykka Rogga Castrima," deliberately reclaiming the derogatory term "rogga" as a use name, which shocks the protagonist. This bold choice signals defiance and pride, challenging societal norms and forcing the protagonist to reconsider their own identity.

Tonkee engages Ykka in conversation, probing about the unconventional use name and the origins of Castrima, which Ykka explains is an unofficial comm serving travelers and miners. The exchange reveals Tonkee's lack of surprise about the protagonist's orogenic nature, suggesting she had already deduced it. The chapter

ends with Ykka's pause as she scrutinizes Hoa, leaving an air of mystery and anticipation for what lies ahead in this strange, hidden community.

# Chapter 18: Syen in the hidden land

Syenite awakens disoriented and in pain on a cold, rocky slope, surrounded by unfamiliar vegetation and a harsh wind. She quickly realizes she is no longer in Allia, where she should be, but in an unknown location with a drastically different climate. Attempting to use her geological sensing abilities, she finds them inexplicably blocked, deepening her confusion and fear. Nearby, Alabaster lies unconscious, and a mysterious figure in white stands at a distance, observing the horizon.

The figure, revealed to be a stone eater—a statue-like being with unnatural features—explains that they are on an island about a hundred miles off the eastern coast. Syenite is horrified; islands are notoriously dangerous due to their proximity to fault lines and tsunamis. When she demands to know why they were brought there, the stone eater claims it was to protect Alabaster. Syenite’s shock intensifies as she processes the implications of encountering a stone eater, a race known for their enigmatic and deadly nature.

Alabaster wakes, groaning in pain from a shoulder wound, and reacts with dismay upon seeing the stone eater, suggesting a prior acquaintance. The stone eater gestures toward the western horizon, where a distant, glowing red smudge marks the destruction of Allia. The revelation that their former location has been obliterated leaves Syenite and Alabaster grappling with the magnitude of their situation. The stone eater’s intervention, while seemingly lifesaving, raises more questions than answers.

As they explore the island further, they discover a small village nestled in a sheltered cove, despite the island’s otherwise barren and inhospitable terrain. The presence of inhabitants in such a precarious location adds another layer of mystery. Syenite and Alabaster, now stranded far from civilization, must confront their reliance on the stone eater’s motives while navigating the aftermath of Allia’s destruction and their own

uncertain future.

# Chapter 19: Damaya, in finality

The chapter follows Damaya, a young orogene in the Fulcrum, as she navigates the isolation and rigid structure of her training. After her potential friend Maxixe turns hostile following Crack's disappearance, Damaya accepts the Fulcrum's harsh reality: orogenes are tools, not people, and friendships are unnecessary. Bored and restless, she fills her free time by exploring the vast Fulcrum complex, observing the lives of the ringed orogenes and the stark contrast between their freedom and the grits' constrained existence. The Fulcrum's unspoken rules allow her to wander freely, as long as she avoids forbidden areas like the Ring Garden or the gates.

Damaya's explorations reveal the Fulcrum's sprawling infrastructure, from landscaped gardens to administrative buildings and practice chambers where advanced orogenes hone their skills. She is particularly drawn to Main, the central hub of the Fulcrum, where orogenes manage their own affairs to prove their self-sufficiency. Though she avoids the Guardians, their presence unsettles her, leaving a strange, acrid sensation she doesn’t understand. The chapter highlights Damaya's growing awareness of the Fulcrum's contradictions—its grandeur and its emptiness, its discipline and its neglect.

Her curiosity leads her to discover abandoned sections of Main, filled with disused offices and forgotten belongings. Intrigued by the mystery, she prepares to explore further, gathering supplies like a lantern and a makeshift knapsack. The deserted halls, lined with discarded furniture and books, hint at a past when the Fulcrum may have been more populous or hopeful. Damaya’s clandestine adventures offer her a rare sense of agency, contrasting sharply with the controlled rigidity of her daily life as a grit.

The chapter culminates in Damaya’s discovery of a floor once used as living quarters, now frozen in time with personal belongings left behind. This eerie find deepens her understanding of the Fulcrum’s history and the transient nature of orogene lives. Her

explorations serve as both an escape and a form of rebellion, subtly challenging the Fulcrum’s dehumanizing ideology. Through Damaya’s eyes, the chapter paints a poignant picture of resilience and quiet defiance in a world that seeks to reduce her to a weapon.

# Chapter 20: you discover wonders down below

The chapter begins with Ykka leading the protagonist and others into a seemingly abandoned house, which serves as a facade for a hidden underground entrance. The cellar’s walls, made of perfectly smooth granite, reveal signs of orogenic manipulation, suggesting advanced skills beyond typical Fulcrum training. Ykka explains that these structures have existed for centuries, hinting at a long history of orogenes working in secrecy. The group proceeds through the cellar, encountering guards who underscore the community’s covert nature, and the protagonist realizes the abandoned village above is merely camouflage for something far more significant below.

As they descend into an ancient tunnel system, the warmth and functional electric lights suggest the community’s self-sufficiency. Ykka shares that the area is riddled with tunnels from past civilizations, some dating back to long-dead nations like Jyamaria. The protagonist expresses concern about the stability of such compromised rock, but Ykka confidently asserts her ability to protect the tunnels, even during catastrophic events like the recent Yumenes Rifting. This reveals her exceptional orogenic power and the community’s reliance on her skills, though she hints at a collective effort to maintain safety in her absence.

The conversation shifts to Tonkee’s curiosity about how Ykka attracts orogenes to the community. Ykka demonstrates an unexplained ability to create an invisible pull, drawing others toward her—a skill she admits she doesn’t fully understand. This phenomenon unsettles the protagonist, who questions its mechanics, but Ykka remains enigmatic, emphasizing the untapped potential of orogenes outside Fulcrum control. The interaction highlights the tension between the protagonist’s Fulcrum-trained skepticism and Ykka’s unconventional methods, foreshadowing deeper exploration of orogenic capabilities.

The chapter concludes with the group venturing further into the tunnel, its ancient architecture and eerie silence underscoring the mystery of the hidden community. Ykka’s leadership and the presence of stone eaters like Hoa add layers of intrigue, suggesting a complex network of alliances and histories. The protagonist’s growing awareness of this underground world challenges their preconceptions, setting the stage for revelations about the true scope of orogenic power and the legacy of past civilizations buried beneath the surface.

# Chapter 21: Syenite on the lookout

Syenite and Alabaster have been in Meov for three days, struggling to adapt to their new environment. Syenite feels out of place due to the language barrier—Meov's inhabitants speak Eturpic, not Sanze-mat—and her inability to learn it. More pressing is their realization that they cannot return to the Fulcrum, as the Guardians who tried to kill them will likely try again. Alabaster points out that Allia's destruction has left them presumed dead, granting them unexpected freedom. However, Syenite is haunted by the devastation of Allia, where a volcanic eruption has left a deep, hexagonal shaft matching the garnet obelisk's dimensions.

Alabaster is exhilarated by their newfound freedom, seeing Meov as a safe haven far from the Fulcrum's reach. He explains that the Guardians cannot easily track them here, as Syenite's connection to hers was severed when her orogeny was negated. Syenite, however, remains uneasy, fearing eventual discovery. Alabaster challenges her attachment to the Fulcrum, questioning whether she truly valued the life it offered or simply accepted its oppressive control. His bluntness angers her, forcing her to confront the harsh reality of her existence as a controlled orogene, or "rogga."

Their tension escalates when Syenite, enraged by Alabaster's provocations, unleashes her orogeny in a violent outburst. Alabaster effortlessly suppresses her power, demonstrating his superior skill. This humiliating defeat underscores Syenite's powerlessness and deepens her resentment. Alabaster apologizes but stands by his point: the Fulcrum's "safety" is an illusion built on slavery. Syenite realizes she hates him not for his strength or madness, but for shattering the comforting lies she relied on to endure her life.

As they return to Meov's cavern level, Syenite notices a massive, dark-hulled ship in the harbor, adding to her sense of displacement. The vessel's imposing presence hints at new complications, leaving her uneasy about their future. The chapter closes with

Syenite grappling with her anger, fear, and the unsettling truth that her freedom comes at a cost she may not be ready to accept.

# Chapter 22: nterlude

The chapter "Interlude" reflects on the fleeting nature of happiness and the enduring impact of pain, which is portrayed as the defining force shaping existence. The narrator dismisses periods of peace as insignificant compared to the transformative power of suffering, likening life to a geological process of heat, pressure, and movement. The text suggests that stillness equates to lifelessness, emphasizing the inevitability of struggle and change. Despite this, the narrator acknowledges that moments of respite did exist, allowing for temporary solidification before the next crisis.

The narrative shifts to a broader perspective, framing the world as a complex battleground with multiple factions beyond a simple binary conflict. It highlights the existence of groups seeking peace, those perpetuating war, and others with motives beyond these extremes. The mention of stone eaters, Guardians, and the Seasons introduces a layered conflict involving supernatural or elemental forces. Father Earth is personified as an active, vengeful entity, reminding readers that the natural world is an unforgiving participant in these struggles.

The chapter underscores the idea that while individuals may experience temporary calm, larger forces are always at work, gathering strength and advancing toward the next confrontation. The use of "she—you—" blurs the line between the protagonist and the reader, creating a sense of shared vulnerability. This technique reinforces the universality of the themes, suggesting that no one is immune to the cyclical nature of conflict and upheaval.

Ultimately, the "Interlude" serves as a meditation on the inevitability of strife and the interconnectedness of all actors in this world. It warns against complacency, as the forces of chaos and power are ever-present, even during periods of apparent peace. The chapter’s tone is both ominous and reflective, urging readers to recognize the

fragility of stability and the enduring presence of underlying tensions.

# Chapter 23: Syenite, stretched and snapped back

Syenite, restless and bored with her domestic life in the Meov community, seeks to join Innon’s pirate crew on their next raid. Despite having a two-year-old son, Corundum, she feels stifled by the monotony of childcare and communal living. Innon initially refuses, citing her recent motherhood, but Syenite argues that she needs purpose beyond parenting. She highlights her skills as an orogene, capable of aiding the crew with tasks like cloaking the ship in fog or creating diversions, abilities Innon lacks due to his untrained orogeny. Their debate underscores Syenite’s frustration and her desire to reclaim her agency.

Innon reluctantly agrees to let Syenite join the crew, but not without voicing his concerns about her ability to follow orders unquestioningly—a necessity for survival at sea. He also questions her apparent lack of attachment to Corundum, implying she’s eager to escape motherhood. Syenite defends herself, acknowledging she loves her son but resents being confined to a domestic role. Her insistence on joining the raid reflects her struggle to balance personal fulfillment with maternal responsibilities, a tension exacerbated by Alabaster’s seemingly effortless devotion to their child.

After securing Innon’s approval, Syenite seeks out Alabaster, who is unsurprised by her decision. Their interaction reveals Alabaster’s quiet acceptance of her choices, contrasting with Innon’s resistance. Syenite finds Alabaster and Corundum on the island’s cliffs, a place Alabaster often retreats to for solitude. The scene hints at their differing approaches to parenthood: Alabaster embraces it with quiet dedication, while Syenite chafes against its constraints. Despite her love for Corundum, Syenite’s need for adventure and purpose ultimately drives her to leave, even temporarily.

The chapter explores themes of identity, autonomy, and the complexities of motherhood in a communal society. Syenite’s struggle to reconcile her roles as a mother, orogene, and individual highlights the tension between societal expectations

and personal desires. Her dynamic with Innon and Alabaster further illustrates the differing ways people navigate relationships and responsibilities. The chapter sets the stage for Syenite’s impending journey, emphasizing her determination to carve out a space for herself beyond the confines of domesticity.

# Chapter 24: you’re getting the band back together

The chapter begins with the protagonist confronting Tonkee, revealing she knows her true identity as Binof, a former Leadership child from Yumenes. Tonkee, now a geomest, admits she has been tracking the protagonist for decades, initially to protect her but later due to her potential to command obelisks. The tension escalates as the protagonist demands explanations, frustrated by the layers of deception. Tonkee’s past is unveiled—she was disowned by her family for rejecting societal norms and pursuing academia, where she thrived despite conflicts. Her obsession with the obelisks stems from a discovery in the Fulcrum, a secret she believes is crucial to understanding their world.

Tonkee explains that the obelisks move toward orogenes with the skill to control them, hinting at a deeper connection between the protagonist and these mysterious structures. The protagonist is unsettled by the revelation that obelisks were converging near her in Tirimo, suggesting her son might also possess this ability. Tonkee’s research, conducted with a network of scholars, reveals patterns in the obelisks’ movements, tying them to orogenic potential. The protagonist’s anger gives way to reluctant curiosity as Tonkee emphasizes the importance of their findings, though the protagonist remains wary of her motives and the implications of her own role in this larger mystery.

The chapter delves into Tonkee’s backstory, detailing her transformation from Binof, a disgraced Leadership heir, to Tonkee, a self-made scholar. Her family’s rejection forced her to adopt a new identity, but she found purpose in studying the obelisks and challenging academic conventions. Her partnership with other researchers underscores the collaborative effort to uncover the obelisks’ secrets, which she believes are tied to a catastrophic event in the past. The protagonist, though skeptical, begins to see Tonkee as more than a manipulative figure—a dedicated scholar driven

by a genuine desire to understand the world’s hidden truths.

As the confrontation winds down, the protagonist acknowledges the inevitability of confronting her own secrets, including her past with Hoa, who watches the exchange silently. The chapter ends with a sense of impending revelation, as Tonkee’s discoveries about the obelisks and their connection to orogenes hint at a larger, unresolved conflict. The protagonist’s exhaustion and frustration are palpable, but the chapter leaves room for the possibility of collaboration, as both characters recognize the weight of the knowledge they now share. The stage is set for further exploration of the obelisks’ role in the world’s upheaval.

# Chapter 25: Syenite, fractured

The chapter opens with the aftermath of a celebratory party thrown by the Meovites to honor the Clalsu's return with valuable goods, including rare stones, aromatic woods, and luxurious fabrics. Despite the festivities, Syenite is haunted by the recent violence she has caused—shutting down a volcano that destroyed a city and killing two ships of people to protect her family's secrecy. While the community revels, she remains in bed, burdened by guilt, and avoids joining the celebrations. Alabaster stays with her, offering comfort and forcing her to engage, though she resists his efforts.

Syenite expresses her reluctance to embrace her past identity as an orogene, rejecting the symbolic rings Alabaster offers her as a marker of her growing power. She insists they are free from the Fulcrum's control and no longer need to conform to its traditions. Alabaster counters that their son, Corundum, will need training to harness his abilities, arguing that Syenite's strength is essential for his future. Their conversation highlights Syenite's internal conflict—she feels unworthy of praise for averting disaster, as she was also the cause of it.

Alabaster shifts the conversation to a historical allegory, recounting the story of Misalem, a figure vilified in Fulcrum teachings. He reveals that Misalem's actions were driven by revenge against the Sanzed Empire, which had committed atrocities during the Season of Teeth, including cannibalizing lesser races. Syenite is shocked by this hidden history, which contradicts the sanitized version taught in the Fulcrum. Alabaster's knowledge comes from his unrestricted access to senior libraries and conversations with an archeomest, hinting at his own complex past.

The chapter concludes with Syenite grappling with the implications of Alabaster's revelations. The Sanzed Empire's brutal history and the Fulcrum's manipulation of truth deepen her disillusionment. Alabaster's attempt to contextualize their struggles within a broader historical framework offers Syenite a new perspective, though she

remains emotionally withdrawn. The chapter underscores themes of guilt, identity, and the weight of hidden histories, as Syenite struggles to reconcile her actions with her sense of self.

# Chapter 26: you’re all you need

The chapter opens with Essun entering a glittering mica structure in Castrima, the comm’s infirmary, where she encounters Antimony, a stone eater who warns Hoa, another stone eater, to keep his distance. The tension between the two stone eaters is palpable, but Essun ignores their standoff and focuses on Alabaster, her former mentor and lover, who lies severely injured on a bed of cushions. His body is partially petrified, with stone replacing flesh, and Essun notices tooth marks on his arm, hinting at Antimony’s role in his condition. Their reunion is fraught with unspoken grief and unresolved history.

Alabaster and Essun exchange strained pleasantries, revealing the depth of their shared trauma. Essun confesses to marrying and having children, though her husband killed one of their orogene children, a loss that haunts her. Alabaster, in turn, admits he understands her murder of Corundum but cannot forgive it. Their conversation is layered with pain and resignation, underscoring the emotional toll of their past actions. Essun declares her intent to kill her husband, prioritizing vengeance over reconciliation, while Alabaster, despite his wounds, refuses to seek retribution against her.

The dialogue shifts to Alabaster probing Essun’s abilities, asking if she can now wield obelisks at will. He directs her attention to a pink spinel blade, which momentarily mesmerizes her, confirming her connection to the obelisks. Alabaster reveals he used the obelisks to tear a rift in the continent, triggering the catastrophic Fifth Season, and admits this was deliberate retaliation against Yumenes. His revelation shocks Essun, who realizes the full extent of his power and the scale of his actions.

Alabaster’s final request is even more startling: he urges Essun not to fix the rift but to worsen it. His demand underscores his nihilistic worldview and his belief in the necessity of destruction. Essun is left speechless, grappling with the moral weight of

his proposition and her own role in the unfolding catastrophe. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving her—and the reader—to ponder the implications of Alabaster’s devastating plan.