The Stone Sky

The Stone Sky is the explosive, Hugo Award-winning conclusion to N.K. Jemisin's groundbreaking *Broken Earth* trilogy—the first series in history to win three consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Novel. As the Fifth Season's apocalyptic devastation reaches its peak, the story converges on two women whose choices will determine the fate of the Stillness:

- **Essun**, the orogene mother turned revolutionary, who must wield the power of the Obelisk Gate to either save humanity or destroy it.
- **Nassun**, her estranged daughter, whose bitter rage has led her to ally with forces that could end the world forever.

With crystalline prose and seismic emotional force, Jemisin explores the cyclical nature of oppression, the cost of vengeance, and whether broken systems can—or should—be repaired. The novel's mythic scale, geological magic, and unflinching social commentary cement its legacy as a masterpiece of speculative fiction.

Chapter 1: PROLOGUE: ME, WHEN I WAS I

The prologue, "Me, When I Was I," opens with a reflective and fragmented recollection of the past, comparing memories to insects trapped in amber—partial and blurred. The narrator, who feels both connected and disconnected from their former self, describes a world vastly different from the present "Stillness." This earlier era, called Syl Anagist, is depicted as a thriving, interconnected civilization where the land and climate were unrecognizable compared to the future. The narrator emphasizes the impermanence of change, noting that while the world transforms, it never truly "ends," only evolves.

Syl Anagist is portrayed as a sprawling, technologically advanced city-nation, its boundaries fluid and its infrastructure interconnected like mold spreading through veins. The cities share culture, resources, and ambitions, functioning as a single entity. The narrator contrasts this unity with the fragmented future of the Stillness, where survival breeds isolation. Syl Anagist's mastery over nature, architecture, and energy is highlighted, with buildings fused with organic life and vehicles defying conventional physics. The city's vibrancy and innovation underscore a world unconstrained by scarcity or fear.

Central to Syl Anagist is the amethyst obelisk, a precursor to the garnet obelisk seen in the Stillness. It pulses with energy, anchoring a network of 256 such structures across the land. The narrator describes a hexagonal complex surrounding the obelisk, where a seemingly idyllic prison holds a boy—later revealed to be the narrator's younger self. The building's design is deceptive, with beauty masking control, as the inhabitants are conditioned to comply without overt coercion. The sterile, white interior contrasts sharply with the vibrant world outside, symbolizing isolation within a thriving society.

The chapter closes with a focus on the boy, Houwha, who gazes at a garden bathed in the obelisk's purple light. His colorless appearance mirrors the room's sterility, yet his presence signifies life amidst artificial constraint. The narrator's fragmented identity and the boy's silent observation hint at a deeper story of transformation and loss. The prologue sets the stage for exploring how Syl Anagist's grandeur gave way to the Stillness, framing the narrative as a meditation on memory, change, and the cost of progress.

Chapter 2: YOU, IN WAKING AND DREAMING

The chapter introduces Essun, the last surviving orogene capable of opening the Obelisk Gate, reflecting on her unexpected rise to power. Once a mediocre Fulcrum-trained orogene, Essun was deemed unremarkable and compliant, which allowed her the freedom to accompany Alabaster on a mission. This decision set her on a path of destruction, accidentally wiping out towns and losing loved ones, including her son Uche and daughter Nassun. Despite her regrets, Essun's journey has transformed her into the world's most powerful orogene, though her power comes at a cost—her body is slowly turning to stone, mirroring Alabaster's fate.

Essun's current state is one of semi-consciousness, caught between waking and dreaming as she recovers from the strain of wielding immense power. She is cared for by a group of ash-covered travelers, who carry her on a stretcher and tend to her basic needs. The world around her is bleak, engulfed in a prolonged Season without sunlight, where survival is a daily struggle. Essun's detachment from physical sensations like hunger and fear underscores her altered state, as she drifts in and out of awareness.

The chapter delves into Essun's dual missions: her responsibility to catch the Moon and end the Fifth Seasons, as tasked by Alabaster and the stone eaters, and her personal desire to reclaim her daughter Nassun from her abusive father. These goals are fraught with urgency, as her deteriorating body hints at limited time. The narrative hints at impending revelations about Nassun's fate, adding tension to Essun's already dire circumstances. Her power, while unparalleled, is a double-edged sword, accelerating her physical decline.

As Essun gradually regains full consciousness, she observes her surroundings with detached curiosity, recognizing familiar rituals of survival among the travelers. The arrival of Hjarka, a familiar face, signals a return to reality, though Essun's thoughts remain fragmented. The chapter closes with a sense of unresolved tension, as Essun's

physical and emotional struggles intertwine with the broader apocalyptic backdrop, setting the stage for her next steps in a world on the brink of collapse.

Chapter 3: NASSUN FEELS LIKE BUSTING LOOSE

Nassun stands over the shattered remains of her father, Jija, who stabbed her after demanding she renounce her orogene identity. Despite her bleeding wound, she remains resolute, having chosen self-acceptance over his conditional love. Her Guardian, Schaffa, watches with cold satisfaction, while Steel, her stone eater, offers her a sense of purpose—something Schaffa's unconditional love cannot provide. In this moment of heartbreak, Nassun craves solidity and direction, even if it means fighting, killing, or dying for it. She embraces her identity as her mother's daughter, unafraid of death, and wields a mysterious crystalline weapon that pulses with power.

The weapon, a sapphire longknife, flickers between solid and intangible states, capable of turning living beings to stone. Nassun struggles to maintain control over it, fearing the consequences if she loses consciousness. Nearby, the Guardians Umber and Nida observe her, their silver tendrils revealing their connection to a greater will. Nassun realizes they are mere puppets, unlike Schaffa, whose tether is weaker. This realization hardens her resolve, and she prepares for confrontation, knowing some truths cannot be ignored. She feints by drawing power from the earth, provoking Umber and Nida into action.

A violent battle ensues as Umber and Nida attack with superhuman speed, their silver-enhanced bodies making them formidable opponents. Nassun, weakened by her injury, fights back using her will and the silver threads in the air, weaving a net to trap Nida. However, Nida effortlessly shreds the net and lunges at Nassun, who panics as she senses the chaotic energy within Nida. Just as Nida's hand reaches for her, Steel intervenes, gripping Nida's throat and halting her advance. Meanwhile, Schaffa and Umber engage in a blur of combat, their movements too fast for Nassun to follow.

The chapter culminates in a tense standoff, highlighting Nassun's desperation and the limits of her power. Steel's intervention underscores his role as her protector, while

Schaffa’s battle with Umber remains unresolved. Nassun’s struggle reflects her internal conflict—between love and purpose, vulnerability and strength. The sapphire weapon symbolizes her potential and peril, as she teeters on the edge of control. The Guardians’ puppet-like nature and Nassun’s defiance set the stage for further confrontation, leaving her fate uncertain as she navigates a world where trust is scarce and survival demands ruthless choices.

Chapter 4: SYL ANAGIST: FIVE

The chapter opens with the narrator, Houwha, encountering a new woman named Kelenli, who stands out due to her striking presence in the ambient—a sensory field perceived by the narrator and others like her. Kelenli’s appearance and energy mark her as kin, though her name, "Kelenli," is a simplified version of her true, more complex identity. The narrator reflects on the challenges of understanding their creators, the conductors, who seem alien in their lack of connection to the ambient. Despite these differences, Houwha strives to perform the expected social rituals, such as introductions, to maintain harmony.

The interaction between Kelenli and the conductor, Pheylen, reveals tensions within their project. Pheylen expresses concerns about risks and delays, hinting at underlying anxieties among the conductors. Kelenli’s composed demeanor masks deeper complexities, as her words carry a weight and texture absent in the conductors’ speech. The narrator is fascinated by Kelenli’s ability to communicate on multiple levels, blending spoken words with subvocal vibrations that resonate more profoundly. This duality underscores the divide between the conductors and those like Houwha, who perceive the world through the ambient.

After Pheylen leaves, Houwha and Gaewha exchange urgent, coded messages about Tetlewha, a member of their group who has been decommissioned. The conductors describe this as a "disruption," but the narrator and Gaewha experience it as a visceral, painful loss. The conductors’ decision to remove Tetlewha has caused instability, prompting Kelenli’s arrival. Gaewha reveals that Kelenli has been sent to address these concerns, though the narrator initially resents the implication that they need guidance. The chapter highlights the disconnect between the conductors’ clinical language and the raw, sensory reality experienced by Houwha and her kin.

Kelenli’s revelation that she is there to teach them surprises Houwha, who believes they already possess the necessary knowledge. However, Kelenli’s ability to seamlessly switch between the conductors’ language and earthtalk—a more profound, layered form of communication—captivates Houwha and Gaewha. Her presence exudes power and complexity, suggesting she may bridge the gap between their world and the conductors’. The chapter ends with Houwha’s curiosity piqued, leaving the reader to wonder what Kelenli’s teachings will entail and how they might alter the group’s dynamic.

Chapter 5: YOU, IMBALANCED

The chapter follows Essun’s struggle to recover physically and emotionally after losing an arm and emerging from a coma. Weak and unbalanced, she lags behind Castrima’s group, often arriving late to camp and receiving minimal resources. Despite her condition, she adapts to walking again, relying on old survival habits and the occasional help of companions like Hoa, Tonkee, and Lerna. Ykka, Castrima’s leader, remains distant and angry, leaving Essun isolated and vulnerable, though Hoa’s protective presence offers some security. The chapter highlights Essun’s resilience but also her growing frustration with her circumstances.

Essun’s small group of allies—Tonkee, Hjarka, Lerna, and Hoa—provide companionship and support, though their dynamics are strained. Lerna, the group’s surgeon, defies Castrima’s indifference to Essun’s condition, arguing for better treatment. Tonkee, ever pragmatic, advises Essun to reconcile with Ykka, emphasizing the fragility of Castrima’s experiment in unity. Meanwhile, Hoa’s erratic behavior adds a surreal touch, underscoring the unpredictability of stone eaters. The group’s interactions reveal tensions between loyalty, survival, and the broader conflicts within Castrima.

The core conflict arises as Essun realizes she’s traveling in the wrong direction, away from her daughter Nassun. Tonkee warns that leaving prematurely would be suicidal, urging Essun to mend ties with Ykka first. Essun’s desperation clashes with Tonkee’s logic, as she wrestles with the fear of losing Nassun forever. The chapter delves into Essun’s internal turmoil, balancing her maternal instincts against the harsh realities of their post-apocalyptic world. Tonkee’s blunt advice forces Essun to confront her irrational impulses, though her anguish remains palpable.

The chapter concludes with a tense exchange between Essun and Tonkee, who offers to secure supplies for a potential departure but cautions against recklessness. Essun’s emotional outburst reveals her vulnerability, while Tonkee’s reluctant sympathy hints

at the complexity of their bond. The narrative underscores the themes of sacrifice, leadership, and the cost of survival, as Essun faces an impossible choice: stay with Castrima or risk everything for Nassun. The unresolved tension leaves readers questioning her next move and the future of her fractured relationships.

Chapter 6: NASSUN, WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS

The chapter opens with Schaffa leading Nassun and eight other children from Found Moon out of Jekity under the pretense of a training trip. Nassun’s recent act of returning the sapphire to the sky has alarmed the comm, prompting the headwoman to hastily provide supplies. The children depart via the "rogga steps," a path only orogenes can traverse, with Wudeh demonstrating newfound control over his abilities. Despite the group’s subdued mood, Nassun grapples with guilt over her father’s death and the consequences her actions have brought upon the others. The twins, Oegin and Ynegen, show her understanding, but fear lingers among the children, who remember her past violence.

At a crossroads, Schaffa informs the children they must part ways, as he and Nassun will face pursuit and danger. Shirk pleads to stay, but Schaffa gently insists they are safer on their own. Wudeh’s bitter laughter underscores their grim reality—being cast out during a Season. Deshati suggests forcing their way into another comm, revealing a hardened resolve to survive. Schaffa, though momentarily reflective, approves of their determination, signaling a shift from his former self. Nassun, consumed by remorse, reflects on the loss of Found Moon’s once-wholesome community, now shattered by her choices.

Schaffa offers chilling advice to the children: if they must infiltrate a comm, they should kill one person painfully and loudly to instill fear. His calm delivery contrasts with the brutality of his words, revealing his expertise in manipulation and terror. The children, including the usually composed Lashar, are stunned, but Nassun recognizes the grim wisdom in his guidance. Schaffa’s transformation is evident as he prioritizes survival over morality, a stark departure from his past self. Nassun, meanwhile,

wrestles with Steel’s prophecy that she will destroy everything she loves.

The chapter concludes with Nassun’s internal conflict, torn between her love for the Found Moon children and the violence she has unleashed upon them. Schaffa’s pragmatic cruelty highlights the harsh world they inhabit, where survival often demands brutality. The children’s fate remains uncertain, but Schaffa’s lessons have armed them with a ruthless strategy. Nassun’s grief and self-loathing deepen as she confronts the irreversible damage she has caused, setting the stage for her continued journey into darkness.

Chapter 7: SYL ANAGIST: FOUR

The chapter delves into the intricate workings of Syl Anagist’s Plutonic Engine, a grand machine designed to harness and unify disparate energies—movement, heat, light, sound, and magic—into a singular, efficient force known as Geoarcanity. The narrators, self-described as "tuners," see their role as vital to this process, weaving these energies into harmony to achieve an idealized future free of want and strife. Despite their limited understanding of the broader project, they take pride in their purpose, even as they acknowledge their status as tools in a larger system. The loss of Tetlewha, a key member of their network, disrupts their balance, requiring time-consuming adjustments to restore harmony.

Kelenli, a uniquely powerful figure, occasionally joins the network, her deep resonance and stability far surpassing the others. The conductors view her as a backup for the Engine’s launch, as her ability to interface with the volatile onyx cabochon—a critical control component—is unmatched. While the others struggle to endure the onyx’s punishing energy, Kelenli effortlessly manages it, leading the group to whimsically conclude the onyx "likes" her. Her superiority hints at a deeper, unexplained quality—a "held note" or inner burn—that sets her apart from the others, who only experience fleeting flares of this energy.

Kelenli’s visits to the narrators reveal her discontent with their sheltered existence. Through earthspeaking—a hidden form of communication—she expresses frustration at their lack of context and sharpness, urging them to seek understanding beyond their confined world. She challenges their acceptance of being mere tools, arguing that even tools should be honed to their finest potential. Her outward calm masks a seething anger, a dichotomy the narrators recognize but do not fully comprehend, as they too have learned to conceal their emotions.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on the narrators’ nature: they are emotionally complex yet outwardly stoic, designed to appear statue-like and unfeeling. Kelenli’s enigmatic presence and her cryptic advice hint at a larger truth about their identity and purpose. The narrators’ passive acceptance of their role contrasts sharply with Kelenli’s defiance, setting the stage for potential rebellion or awakening. Her final teasing remark about being "liked" underscores the tension between their programmed disinterest in intimacy and the deeper connections they might yet forge.

Chapter 8: YOU ARE REMEMBERED

The chapter opens with the group camped in the stone forest, anticipating an attack at dawn. Despite preparations, many remain restless, including Hunters and Strongbacks who should be resting. Hjarka, though seemingly asleep, is alert with weapons ready. The attack begins, and the protagonist senses a powerful orogenic fulcrum rooted nearby, signaling an imminent threat. Ykka, the group's leader, quickly responds, attempting to communicate with the hidden orogene rather than engage in immediate combat. The tension is palpable as both sides prepare for confrontation.

Ykka uses her unique abilities to detect the orogene's presence, noting the simplicity of his silver energy compared to the surrounding environment. She offers peace, inviting the orogene to join them rather than fight. However, the situation escalates when raiders from the opposite side of the forest launch a surprise attack. The protagonist, though capable of intervening, hesitates due to the risk of their magic turning them to stone. The camp's defenders, including the formidable Danel, repel the raiders with ease, highlighting the disparity between organized comms and desperate commless groups.

The protagonist reflects on the raiders' futile strategy, realizing they likely relied on their orogene to turn the tide. Yet, the orogene remains inactive, leaving the raiders vulnerable. The protagonist ventures into the stone forest alone, despite the danger, driven by curiosity and a need to understand the orogene's intentions. The chapter underscores the unpredictability of survival in this harsh world, where alliances and power dynamics shift rapidly.

The narrative emphasizes themes of trust, survival, and the complexities of power. Ykka's attempt at diplomacy contrasts with the violent reality of the raiders' attack, while the protagonist's internal struggle with their abilities adds depth to their character. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving the protagonist's fate uncertain

as they step deeper into the forest, setting the stage for further conflict or revelation.

Chapter 9: NASSUN MAKES HER FATE

The chapter follows Nassun and Schaffa on their monthlong journey to Steel’s deadciv ruin, navigating the harsh realities of a world deep into the apocalyptic Season. Their travel is marked by scarcity, as they forage for food and endure physical hardships, including Nassun’s healing shoulder wound. The road is eerily empty, with most survivors either joined in raider bands or perished, leaving the pair in near-solitude. Nassun reflects on her mixed feelings about this isolation—relieved to have Schaffa’s undivided attention yet nostalgic for the camaraderie of other orogene children she once knew.

Nassun and Schaffa’s bond deepens during their journey, characterized by quiet companionship and shared survival. At night, they curl together for warmth, but Schaffa’s sleep is often plagued by pain, which Nassun notices with growing concern. Determined to help, she secretly shares her silver—a mysterious energy source—with the corestone embedded in his brain, easing his suffering. This act, though risky, strengthens their connection, as Nassun sees it as a symbiotic exchange rather than parasitic. She takes pride in her ability to care for him, even as she grapples with the moral ambiguity of her actions.

Schaffa occasionally shares stories of Yumenes, a once-great city now lost to time and his fragmented memory. His tales paint a picture of a complex, stratified society, alien to Nassun’s experiences. She also probes him about the Fulcrum and her mother, Essun, but these inquiries dredge up painful, half-remembered fragments for Schaffa, forcing Nassun to tread carefully. Despite learning little new information, these conversations help Nassun piece together her mother’s past and the world before the Season, offering her a fragile sense of connection.

As they near their destination, the environment grows increasingly hostile, with relentless ashfall and eerie, lifeless landscapes. Their instincts save them from

potential dangers, like a suspiciously still pond. Finally, after 29 days, they arrive at the Old Man’s Pucker, a geological marvel—a pristine caldera within a caldera. Nassun is awed by its perfection, a stark contrast to the ruined world around them, hinting at the ancient power and mysteries they are about to confront.

Chapter 10: SYL ANAGIST: THREE

The chapter follows a group of young tuners from Syl Anagist as they embark on a field excursion outside their familiar environment. Overwhelmed by sensory stimuli—unfamiliar textures, smells, and sounds—they struggle to adapt until the sight of the towering amethyst plutonic fragment calms them. The crystal, pulsing with magic, evokes a deep emotional connection, contrasting with their indifference toward the city itself. The tuners revere the fragment as part of their identity, reflecting Syl Anagist's reverence for engineered life over the sterile, unchanging urban landscape of the past.

Kelenli, their guide, announces she will show them three vetted sights, prompting playful tension with Remwha, who resents the trip. As they walk, the tuners' awkwardness draws stares, but they gradually mimic Kelenli's confident demeanor to blend in. Their journey takes them to the city's southern edge, where sulfurous smells from waste reclamation plants permeate the air. Kelenli leads them to an ancient, dead building—a stark contrast to Syl Anagist's living architecture—eliciting mixed reactions from the group.

The building's obsolete design, with its symmetrical structure and non-living materials, fascinates the tuners despite their initial disdain. Remwha questions its safety, but Kelenli reassures him before guiding them inside. A holographic sign and booming voice welcome them to "the story of enervation," though its meaning remains unclear. Inside, the stale, lifeless air and dusty atmosphere unsettle the group, but their curiosity outweighs their discomfort as they explore further.

As they move deeper into the building, Remwha senses something unusual, prompting the others to notice it too. Kelenli promises to reveal the source of their unease, hinting at a deeper purpose behind the excursion. The chapter ends with the group poised to uncover a hidden truth, their journey serving as both a physical and

metaphorical exploration of Syl Anagist’s past and their own place within its engineered world.

Chapter 11: YOU’RE PLANNING AHEAD

The chapter begins with Ykka’s unexpected willingness to integrate Maxixe and his group into Castrima, despite their health issues. She values their resources, knowledge, and orogenic skills, pragmatically noting that Maxixe’s survival need only last long enough to benefit the community. Her tactful avoidance of mentioning Alabaster hints at a growing forgiveness toward the protagonist, Essun, who reflects on the fragile hope of rebuilding friendships. However, Essun’s internal struggle resurfaces as she questions her reasons for staying in Castrima—primarily for Nassun’s future, her own limitations, and the lack of direction in finding her daughter.

Essun’s emotional turmoil deepens when Hoa, her stone-eater companion, reveals he can track Nassun’s movements due to her connection with an obelisk. His troubled tone hints at a darker reality: Nassun may be attempting to open the Obelisk Gate herself, a feat that could kill her. Essun’s immediate fear stems from her awareness of Nassun’s latent power, surpassing her own understanding of the obelisks. Hoa’s hesitation further reveals that Nassun’s actions have drawn the attention of other stone eaters, particularly the manipulative Gray Man, who seeks to exploit orogenes for his own ends.

The tension escalates as Essun confronts Hoa about his selective honesty, accusing him of withholding critical truths. Their argument underscores her frustration and helplessness, compounded by the revelation that Nassun intentionally killed her father, Jija. This news shocks Essun, who grapples with conflicting emotions—relief at Nassun’s safety, fear for her daughter’s moral descent, and a dawning realization of Nassun’s agency and potential trauma. Hoa’s delivery of this information leaves Essun silent and troubled, foreshadowing deeper emotional and existential crises.

The chapter closes with Essun’s internal chaos laid bare, though her outward composure remains intact. The narrative emphasizes her complex relationship with

Hoa, her grief for Alabaster, and her mounting dread for Nassun’s fate. The revelations about Nassun’s actions and the stone eaters’ machinations set the stage for a fraught journey ahead, blending personal stakes with broader existential threats. Essun’s resilience is tested as she confronts the consequences of her choices and the unsettling evolution of her daughter’s power.

Chapter 12: NASSUN UNDERGROUND

Nassun and Schaffa descend a mysterious underground stairwell, its walls unnervingly clean and its lights still functional despite being part of an ancient ruin. Nassun questions the oddities of the place, but Schaffa admits he doesn’t fully understand the workings of such "deadciv" remnants. Their journey is tense, with Nassun observing Schaffa’s mood through subtle physical cues, a habit ingrained from her troubled past. As they pause to rest on a landing, Nassun’s exhaustion and curiosity lead her to press Schaffa about the purpose of Guardians during a Season, hinting at deeper mysteries surrounding their role.

Schaffa explains that Guardians leave their communities during Seasons because they are unable to contribute long-term—unable to have children and becoming increasingly difficult to live with due to their need for "silver," a resource tied to orogeny. Nassun deduces that Guardians may take silver from non-orogenes, a dark possibility. When she asks if Schaffa ever tried to have children, he reveals that Guardians carry the latent trait of orogeny, though it doesn’t manifest in them. This revelation unsettles Nassun, who reflects on the cruelty of her own orogene upbringing compared to Schaffa’s hidden inheritance.

The conversation takes a darker turn as Schaffa recalls fragments of his past, including the painful corestone embedded in his neck, a visible reminder of the violence done to him. Nassun struggles to reconcile the kindness of Schaffa with the brutality of other Guardians. Schaffa admits that while he once believed he loved the orogenes he guarded, his role involved enforcing small cruelties to prevent greater atrocities—genocide. He defines genocide as the systematic eradication of orogenes, not just through killing but through dehumanization and sterilization, a reality that has been unfolding for centuries.

Nassun grapples with the horrifying realization that the persecution of orogenes is not accidental but deliberately engineered by the Guardians. Despite their power, orogenes are vulnerable because they depend on society for survival. The chapter ends with Nassun questioning whether true genocide doesn’t always leave physical bodies—suggesting that the destruction of personhood and hope can be just as lethal. This revelation leaves her with a growing certainty about the systemic forces arrayed against her and all orogenes.

Chapter 13: SYL ANAGIST: TWO

The chapter follows a group of genetically engineered beings as they explore a luxurious house and garden in Syl Anagist, guided by their enigmatic leader, Kelenli. The house, with its vibrant colors and comfortable furnishings, starkly contrasts their sterile, prison-like living quarters, prompting the narrator to question their own existence for the first time. During their journey to the house, they encounter hostility from a man who views them as abominations, highlighting the prejudice they face as constructs. Kelenli remains composed, but the incident leaves the group unsettled and acutely aware of their outsider status in this "normal" world.

The garden behind the house offers a sense of freedom and wonder, with its wild, imperfect flora and tactile pleasures like springy lichens and fragrant flowers. The group revels in these new sensations, their emotions heightened—Gaewha fiercely claims flowers, others engage in playful or curious activities. The narrator, however, is fixated on Kelenli, grappling with unfamiliar feelings of admiration and longing, which they tentatively label as love. This emotional intensity surprises them, as they had previously believed themselves above such human-like passions.

Kelenli leads them to a small stone structure in the garden, which reveals her personal space—a stark contrast to the opulent main house. The presence of books, a hairbrush, and other personal items suggests a life of autonomy and learning, deepening the narrator’s fascination. Kelenli shares a cryptic revelation about her upbringing with Conductor Gallat, hinting at her role as a "control" in an experiment and alluding to her mixed ancestry. This disclosure sparks a moment of realization for the narrator, though Kelenli’s somber tone suggests darker truths remain unspoken.

The chapter underscores the group’s growing awareness of their own otherness and the complexities of their existence. Through their interactions with the city, its people, and Kelenli, they confront emotions and societal biases they had never before

considered. The narrator’s introspection and Kelenli’s layered identity serve as catalysts for their evolving understanding of self, belonging, and the harsh realities of Syl Anagist’s world.

Chapter 14: THE DESERT, BRIEFLY, AND YOU

The chapter opens with the community of Castrima preparing to cross the Merz desert during a harsh Season. Tonkee, an Innovator, assures Ykka that water and temperature won’t be major issues due to dew-catchers and ash clouds. However, the real danger lies in the scarcity of food, as most desert life hibernates underground. Stonelore advises against desert travel during Seasons, but Castrima has no choice. The comm spends two days preparing, though Ykka privately admits no amount of preparation can prevent casualties. The protagonist, aware of their own survival advantage thanks to Hoa, resolves to bear witness to the suffering and fight to minimize losses.

The community works tirelessly to stockpile supplies before the journey. Cookfires run double shifts to preserve food, while Maxixe’s survivors aid in foraging for abandoned resources. Speed is critical, as survival depends on crossing the desert before supplies run out. Tonkee oversees the redesign of storage wagons for better durability and efficiency, while Resistants and Breeders redistribute supplies to mitigate risks. The chapter highlights the collective effort and ingenuity required to face the desert’s challenges, underscoring the grim reality that some will not survive the crossing.

The narrative shifts to a personal moment the night before the desert crossing. The protagonist, struggling to eat with one arm, is approached by Danel, a former Lorist now in the Strongbacks. Danel reveals her knowledge of the protagonist’s past as a ten-ring orogene and their rumored ability to manipulate obelisks. She probes further, suggesting the protagonist plans to end the Season and may need companions. The conversation takes a reflective turn as Danel shares her identity as a Lorist, a caste traditionally tasked with preserving knowledge and fighting skills, and laments forgetting parts of her heritage due to the Season’s upheaval.

Danel’s revelation adds depth to her character and hints at the broader cultural erosion caused by the Season. She sees the protagonist as a potential hero in a new story, though the protagonist dismisses the idea. The chapter ends on an ambiguous note, with Danel’s belief in the protagonist’s role contrasting with their own uncertainty. This exchange underscores themes of identity, legacy, and the weight of responsibility in a world where survival and storytelling are intertwined. The desert looms ahead, symbolizing both physical and existential trials for the community and the protagonist.

Chapter 15: NASSUN, THROUGH THE FIRE

The chapter follows Nassun and Schaffa as they board a mysterious pearlescent vehicle called a "vehimal," which transports them through the earth toward Corepoint. The vehimal's interior is adorned with elegant gold-like designs and strangely comfortable shell-shaped seats, leaving Nassun in awe of its unknown materials and origins. A disembodied female voice speaks in an unfamiliar yet oddly rhythmic language, which Schaffa partially translates, revealing details about their journey. Nassun is both fascinated and unsettled by the vehimal's sentient-like behavior, questioning whether it is alive or merely an advanced creation of its long-lost builders.

Schaffa exhibits uncharacteristic restlessness, pacing the vehimal and grappling with fragmented memories of having been there before. His agitation unsettles Nassun, as he struggles to recall the context of his familiarity with the vehicle and its language. His distress hints at deeper, suppressed trauma, contrasting with his usual composed demeanor. Nassun tries to comfort him, but the vehimal interrupts with another announcement, this time directly addressing them and offering to show them something during their transit. The voice's sudden switch to fragments of their language unnerves Nassun further.

The vehimal transforms part of its wall into a transparent window, revealing a dark tunnel illuminated by rectangular lights. Nassun observes the rough-hewn walls, surprised by their lack of the seamless perfection typical of the obelisk-builders' technology. The vehimal moves steadily but slowly, leaving Nassun both intrigued and impatient about the six-hour journey. She wonders how such a pace could possibly cover the distance to the other side of the world, and the monotony of the ride begins to weigh on her.

The chapter blends wonder with unease, as Nassun and Schaffa navigate the vehimal's alien environment. Nassun's curiosity about the advanced technology is tempered by

her fear of its unknown nature, while Schaffa's fractured memories add a layer of mystery to their journey. The vehimal's sentient-like interactions and the eerie tunnel visuals create a sense of anticipation, leaving the reader questioning the true purpose of their destination, Corepoint, and the secrets it may hold.

Chapter 16: SYL ANAGIST: ONE

The chapter opens with the unexpected removal of Kelenli, a key figure, by Conductor Gallat and other high-ranking officials. The narrator, part of a group called the tuners, observes the interaction with a mix of fear and protectiveness. Gallat, the cruelest of the conductors, confronts Kelenli about her refusal to conform, revealing his emotional vulnerability when she remains calm and detached. The tension between them underscores a power dynamic where Kelenli’s defiance challenges Gallat’s authority, even as he relies on her expertise for the Plutonic Engine project.

Kelenli’s dismissal of the tuners before leaving is a calculated act to protect them from further scrutiny. The narrator understands her strategy—feigning indifference to shorten collective punishment—but struggles with the emotional weight of her departure. Gallat, now irritable, hurriedly escorts the tuners to a vehimal, ignoring their basic needs. The other conductors gossip about Kelenli’s defiance, questioning her value, but Gallat defends her contributions, highlighting her indispensable role in the project’s progress.

During the journey, the narrator observes the subtle discrimination Gallat faces due to his Niess-like traits, which the other conductors disdain. This revelation adds depth to Gallat’s harsh behavior, suggesting he perpetuates his own marginalization onto the tuners. The narrator, though afraid of Gallat, chooses bravery for Kelenli’s sake and confronts him about his anger toward her. The question unsettles Gallat, and the narrator holds his gaze, channeling collective resentment through the network.

The chapter closes with unresolved tension as the narrator’s defiance mirrors Kelenli’s earlier resistance. The interaction exposes Gallat’s fragility and the tuners’ growing awareness of their own power. The dynamics between the conductors and the tuners reflect broader themes of control, exploitation, and the silent resistance of the oppressed. The narrator’s courage marks a pivotal moment, hinting at a shift in the

group’s passive acceptance of their subjugation.

Chapter 17: YOU’RE ALMOST HOME

The chapter opens with the protagonist and the Castrimans encountering guards at a node station, who mistake them for raiders and attack. Despite their ragged appearance, the Castrimans retaliate, with Maxixe using orogeny to deflect crossbow bolts and breach the gates. The protagonist critiques Maxixe’s technique, noting his lack of practice due to starvation, but acknowledges his effort. The scene highlights the group’s desperation and the harsh realities of their survival, as well as the protagonist’s leadership role in guiding the Castrimans through conflict.

After securing the node station, the protagonist and Ykka discuss their next steps, emphasizing the need to preserve the node maintainer and any doctors inside. The protagonist warns against killing the maintainer, stressing the importance of their specialized skills. This exchange reveals the moral dilemmas they face, balancing survival with ethical considerations. The protagonist’s internal conflict—struggling with bitterness while advocating for mercy—underscores the chapter’s theme of humanity in the face of brutality.

The narrative shifts to a vivid description of the Rifting, a catastrophic geological event dominating the northern horizon. The protagonist and others observe the massive ash wall, a constant reminder of the world’s instability. The orogenes’ heightened sensitivity to seismic activity adds tension, as they must resist the urge to react, knowing it could be fatal. This section emphasizes the environmental and psychological toll of the Rifting, setting the stage for the group’s precarious future.

The chapter concludes with the protagonist preparing to show Ykka the grim reality of the node maintainer’s condition, symbolizing the sacrifices orogenes must endure for survival. The protagonist’s resolve to confront this horror reflects their acceptance of responsibility and the need for Ykka to understand the full cost of their choices. The chapter ends on a somber note, with the group settling into the node station, their

temporary respite overshadowed by the looming challenges ahead.

Chapter 18: NASSUN, NOT ALONE

The chapter opens with Nassun arriving at Corepoint, a silent and eerie city, where she struggles to drag Schaffa’s unconscious body through the deserted streets. Exhausted and desperate, she collapses after attempting to use magic to aid her efforts. The city’s unnatural stillness is punctuated by the presence of stone eaters, who watch her impassively but offer no help. Their stillness contrasts sharply with Nassun’s frantic movements, highlighting her isolation in this strange, otherworldly place.

Interspersed with Nassun’s ordeal are journal entries from an unnamed narrator, possibly Hoa, reflecting on their time in Corepoint. The entries reveal a deep sense of loss and madness, as the narrator grapples with memories of loved ones like Innon and Syenite. The city’s oppressive environment exacerbates their loneliness, and their fragmented thoughts oscillate between bitterness and longing. The narrator also hints at Corepoint’s dark purpose, referencing the mysterious hole and its connection to the Obelisk Gate, though much remains unclear.

Corepoint is described as a unique, resilient city built to withstand harsh oceanic winds, with structures designed to minimize wind resistance. Unlike the ruined cities of the past, Corepoint remains intact but eerily devoid of human life, inhabited only by stone eaters. The city’s underground facilities, once meant for geomagests, now serve as the home of the Guardians. This duality—surface stillness and hidden activity—adds to the sense of mystery and foreboding that permeates the chapter.

The chapter concludes with Steel, a stone eater, offering Nassun shelter in a nearby apartment. Despite her exhaustion, she gathers the strength to drag Schaffa toward the suggested location. Meanwhile, the narrator’s journal entries grow more erratic, expressing frustration with their isolation and the city’s secrets. The juxtaposition of Nassun’s physical struggle and the narrator’s emotional turmoil underscores the chapter’s themes of abandonment, resilience, and the weight of unseen forces shaping

their lives.

Chapter 19: SYL ANAGIST: ZERO

The chapter opens with a poignant moment between two ancient beings, Houwha and Gaewha (also called Antimony), who share a complex history as siblings, rivals, and now cautious allies. Their dialogue reveals a sense of nostalgia and unresolved tension, as they reflect on their past names and actions. Gaewha questions whether Houwha regrets their choices, but the response is ambiguous, hinting at deeper layers of guilt and acceptance. The scene underscores their enduring connection amid the weight of millennia, as they prepare to face an uncertain future together.

The narrative then shifts to a reflection on Alabaster’s past, revealing his struggles with societal betrayal and the burden of forbidden knowledge. As a young man, Alabaster initially conformed to the oppressive system of the Fulcrum, but his encounter with an ancient lore cache shattered his complacency. The tablets exposed the cyclical nature of oppression and the lost history of Syl Anagist, leaving him overwhelmed and disillusioned. His temporary breakdown and subsequent punishment highlight the systemic cruelty faced by orogenes, even those of high status, and foreshadow his eventual rebellion.

The chapter further explores themes of awakening and resistance through Houwha’s perspective. After returning from a mission with Kelenli, Houwha’s perception of Syl Anagist’s beauty is tainted by the realization of its exploitative underpinnings. The city’s splendor is revealed as a facade for magical harvesting and control, mirroring the broader societal hypocrisy. When Conductor Stahnyn dismisses Houwha’s request to visit the garden, the interaction underscores the rigid constraints placed on their kind, fueling Houwha’s growing defiance and awareness of systemic oppression.

The chapter weaves together past and present, illustrating the cyclical nature of oppression and the slow, painful process of awakening to injustice. Through Alabaster’s and Houwha’s experiences, it emphasizes the emotional and psychological

toll of resisting societal norms, as well as the fleeting moments of solidarity among those who dare to challenge the status quo. The narrative leaves readers with a sense of impending upheaval, as the characters grapple with their roles in a world built on exploitation and lies.

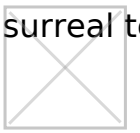
Chapter 20: NASSUN AND ESSUN, ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE WORLD

The chapter alternates between the perspectives of Nassun and Essun, both poised to enact world-altering decisions. Nassun, at sunset, resolves to collide the Moon with Earth, driven by a twisted love and despair. She cares for Schaffa, her guardian, ensuring his comfort before her departure, acknowledging the inevitability of destruction. The narrative reflects on her capacity for love despite her traumatic experiences, framing her catastrophic choice as a tragic response to a broken world. Meanwhile, Essun awakens at dawn, preparing for her own transformative mission, surrounded by companions who have gathered to bid her farewell.

Essun’s journey is marked by reluctant camaraderie and unresolved emotions. Her companions—Lerna, Tonkee, Hjarka, Ykka, and others—assemble in a makeshift camp, their presence a mix of support and unintended burden. Essun grapples with their admiration, feeling unworthy yet determined to prove herself. The group’s dynamic is bittersweet, blending humor and melancholy as they prepare for an uncertain future. Ykka’s reappearance, especially, stirs mixed feelings, as she balances her leadership duties with a grudging affection for Essun.

The chapter underscores themes of inevitability and cyclical tragedy. Nassun’s belief that some things are “too broken to be fixed” mirrors Essun’s own resignation to a doomed world. Both characters act from a place of love and despair, their choices framed as the only responses to systemic suffering. Nassun’s reference to a “commandment set in stone” hints at the inescapable patterns of history, while Essun’s companions embody the fragile hope of breaking those cycles. The narrative juxtaposes their parallel journeys, emphasizing the weight of their decisions.

Ultimately, the chapter captures a moment of transition, where characters confront the limits of their agency. Nassun’s cold determination contrasts with Essun’s reluctant leadership, yet both are united by their desire to end suffering. The gathering of Essun’s friends—some joining, some staying—adds a layer of poignancy, highlighting the human connections that persist even in the face of annihilation. The chapter closes with a hint of dark humor, as Essun laughs at the absurdity of their “quest,” underscoring the surreal tension between hope and inevitability.



Chapter 21: I, AT THE END OF DAYS

The chapter depicts a poignant reunion between a mother and her daughter, Nassun, after two years of separation. The mother, physically weathered by hardship—thin, scarred, and missing an arm—stands before Nassun with anguish, while Nassun appears taller, stronger, and markedly changed. The daughter's orogeny, a powerful ability, is palpable to the mother, who senses the weight of their shared traits. Their interaction is strained; the mother's desperate plea for connection is met with Nassun's guarded detachment, as she prioritizes helping her guardian, Schaffa, over reconnecting with her mother.

Nassun's loyalty to Schaffa is unwavering, contrasting sharply with her mother's fraught history. Schaffa, who protected and nurtured Nassun, represents safety and love, while the mother's past failures loom large. Nassun understands her mother's trauma—particularly her fear of burgundy, tied to the Fulcrum's abuses—but this knowledge doesn't bridge the emotional divide. The mother grapples with the realization that their relationship may be irreparably broken, echoing Alabaster's belief that some things are beyond repair. Nassun's weariness and resignation underscore this chasm.

The tension escalates as the mother tries to stop Nassun from pursuing her goal of using the Obelisk Gate, a dangerous endeavor. Nassun's determination is unshakable, and her mother's hesitation only reinforces her resolve. The daughter's hardened demeanor reflects her upbringing under Schaffa's influence, where hesitation equates to refusal. The mother's desperate attempts to connect—mentioning Nassun's father, Jija, and offering help—only provoke anger and further alienation. Nassun's focus remains fixed on saving Schaffa, leaving no room for reconciliation.

The chapter culminates in a stark power dynamic shift. Nassun, now assertive and independent, dismisses her mother's pleas, embodying the consequences of their

fractured bond. The mother’s helplessness is palpable as she watches Nassun walk away, symbolizing the irreversible rift between them. The narrative underscores themes of broken trust, the weight of past trauma, and the inevitability of change, leaving the mother to confront the painful truth that she has lost her daughter to the forces that shaped them both.

Chapter 22: ODA: ME, AND YOU

The chapter opens with Tonkee and others observing the Moon’s unchanging presence in the sky, despite its erratic shifts in shape and color. Tonkee, though not an expert, attempts to track its movement using an ancient writing tool, but her efforts are thwarted by seismic activity and her own limitations. Meanwhile, the Obelisk Gate dismantles itself, with the obelisks dematerializing and descending into Corepoint’s chasm. The onyx obelisk, however, is preserved in the ocean, a deliberate act by its creators to safeguard it for future use, though the narrator ominously hopes it remains undiscovered.

Nassun, grieving the death of a loved one, is found by Tonkee sitting beside their remains. The two share a moment of quiet sorrow, united in their loss. Later, Nassun and Danel retrieve Schaffa from Warren, where the other Guardians have turned to jewel. Schaffa, weakened and disoriented, comforts Nassun as the group gathers under the Moon, perhaps mourning or simply seeking solace in each other’s company. The scene underscores the emotional toll of the cataclysmic events they’ve endured.

Elsewhere, the narrator, Gaewha, and Remwha confront the aftermath of Nassun’s choices. Remwha, weary from millennia of existence, expresses his desire for an end, but Gaewha reminds him of their purpose: to improve the world. After a tense exchange, they and other ancient beings descend to the Earth’s heart, negotiating an end to the Seasons in exchange for the Moon’s return and the obelisks’ sacrifice. The Earth accepts, releasing trapped souls and signaling a new era of balance.

Months later, the narrator returns to find Nassun and the others adapting to their new reality, surviving on meager resources. Though they’ve shown resilience, their long-term survival depends on returning to the Stillness. The chapter closes with Nassun still lingering by the pylon, hinting at her unresolved grief and the uncertain future ahead. The narrative reflects on themes of loss, renewal, and the cyclical nature of

history, leaving room for hope amid the devastation.