The Obelisk Gate

The Obelisk Gate continues N.K. Jemisin's Hugo Award-winning *Broken Earth* trilogy, plunging readers deeper into a world ravaged by apocalyptic climate disasters. As the Fifth Season—a catastrophic climate event—unfolds, the story follows:

- **Essun**, a grieving mother and powerful orogene, who seeks refuge in the underground comm of Castrima while hunting her daughter's kidnapper.
- **Nassun**, Essun's missing daughter, whose emerging powers draw her into a dangerous faction with world-altering ambitions.
- **Alabaster**, Essun's former lover, whose dying act could either save humanity or doom it forever.

As civilizations crumble and ancient forces awaken, Jemisin masterfully explores oppression, survival, and the terrifying price of power. The novel's revolutionary second-person narration and geological magic system cement its status as a landmark in speculative fiction.

Chapter 1: Nassun, on the rocks

The chapter opens with a reflective meditation on identity, emphasizing how individuals are shaped by their relationships and experiences. The narrator addresses Essun directly, reminding her that she already knows her fate and the survival of her living child, Nassun. At eight years old, Nassun returns home to find her younger brother dead and her father standing over the body, a traumatic event that remains shrouded in mystery. The narrative then shifts to explore Nassun's apprenticeship as a lorist, a role deeply tied to the preservation of history and survival lore in the Stillness,

despite its diminished significance over time.

Lorists are described as enigmatic figures with a complex history, originating from the Regwo people but now largely disconnected from their roots. They carry polymer tablets, wear shabby clothes, and are recognized by their black-tinted lips, a fading tribute to their ancestors. Though their knowledge is often dismissed as unreliable, lorists serve as teachers, entertainers, and symbols of resilience during harsh times. Their survival through Seasons and societal changes highlights their enduring, if diminished, role in the Stillness. The chapter underscores the irony of their persistence despite institutional rejection and cultural erosion.

The focus then narrows to Renthree Lorist Stone, a wandering lorist who arrives in Tirimo. Once a glass-smith, Renthree was drawn into the lorist life by love and circumstance, embodying the profession’s cyclical nature. Her backstory reveals the personal sacrifices and fleeting connections that define lorists’ lives. When Nassun seeks her out, skipping creche to offer a diamond-embedded rock as tribute, the encounter becomes a pivotal moment. Nassun’s excitement and naivety contrast with Renthree’s seasoned perspective, hinting at the unspoken significance of the gift.

Nassun’s act of offering the diamond—a discovery made possible by her hidden orogeny—carries unintended weight. Unaware of its true value, she presents it as a token of her admiration, defying her mother’s warnings to conceal her abilities. The chapter closes with Renthree’s stunned reaction, foreshadowing the consequences of Nassun’s actions and the looming conflict between her potential and the constraints imposed by her world. The scene encapsulates themes of innocence, hidden power, and the tension between individual ambition and societal expectations.

Chapter 2: you, continued

The chapter opens with Essun reuniting with Alabaster, a powerful orogene who is slowly turning to stone. He reveals the existence of a moon, challenging her skepticism about astronomestry, a discipline dismissed in their world. Their conversation is tense, filled with old grievances and unresolved dynamics, as Alabaster urges Essun to harness the power of the obelisks—floating crystals that amplify orogeny. Essun resists, recalling the dangers of past attempts, but Alabaster insists, hinting at a greater purpose tied to the satellite. Their exchange underscores their complex relationship, blending camaraderie, frustration, and mutual concern.

Alabaster’s insistence on Essun testing her ability to control the obelisks drives the chapter’s tension. He warns her of the risks, recalling how her previous encounter with an obelisk nearly killed her. Despite his cryptic explanations, he emphasizes the urgency of her success, suggesting failure would render his plans irrelevant. Essun, still grappling with the trauma of her past and the loss of her son, is reluctant but intrigued. The dialogue reveals Alabaster’s desperation and Essun’s internal conflict, balancing her distrust with her respect for his knowledge.

The interaction shifts to Essun’s encounter with Antimony, a stone eater guarding Alabaster. Their brief, enigmatic exchange highlights the mysterious nature of stone eaters, who seem to operate by their own inscrutable logic. Essun’s departure from Alabaster’s presence is tinged with unresolved emotions, and she is joined by Hoa, another stone eater who follows her protectively. The chapter subtly explores themes of trust and betrayal, as Essun navigates her relationships with these non-human entities while processing Alabaster’s revelations.

The chapter concludes with Essun preparing to leave Castrima’s underground comm to test her obelisk-calling abilities. Lerna, her companion, advises a diplomatic approach to gain permission, contrasting with Essun’s impulsive defiance. Their brief clash

reflects Essun’s struggle to reconcile her past actions with her present circumstances. The chapter ends on a note of anticipation, as Essun’s next steps—both in mastering the obelisks and uncovering Alabaster’s secrets—remain uncertain, setting the stage for further developments.

Chapter 3: Schaffa, forgotten

The chapter delves into the pivotal moment when Syenite, a powerful orogene, taps into an obelisk's energy, unleashing a catastrophic force that destroys the Clalsu ship. Schaffa, her Guardian, recognizes the danger but is powerless to stop her. As the ship collapses, he survives the initial blast due to luck, though he suffers severe injuries. Meanwhile, Syenite, consumed by grief and the obelisk's power, becomes oblivious to Schaffa, who once held immense significance in her life. The scene underscores the tragic irony of Schaffa's care for her, even as she inadvertently causes his near-death.

As Schaffa is thrown into the ocean, his survival instincts clash with his physical limits. Guardians are resilient, but the combination of drowning, organ failure, and blunt force trauma pushes him to the brink. Despite his desperation to live, he struggles against the sinking wreckage, fighting panic—a forbidden state for Guardians. His terror gives way to an unnatural anger, signaling the intrusion of an external force. This presence offers him survival at a terrible cost: the erosion of his identity. Schaffa resists, knowing the price is his very self, but the agony of dying weakens his resolve.

The entity seizes Schaffa's moment of vulnerability, granting him unnatural power to heal and adapt, allowing him to breathe underwater temporarily. However, this comes at the cost of his memories and essence. As his brain cells die, he clings to his identity, swimming toward the surface with a mix of borrowed rage and personal fury. The chapter highlights the horror of his transformation—his body survives, but his mind is forever altered. The cold presence at the back of his skull symbolizes the irreversible loss of who he once was.

Emerging from the water, Schaffa vomits seawater and gasps for air, narrowly avoiding total annihilation. Though he retains his name and a shred of self, much of his former identity is lost. The chapter ends with the haunting realization that the Schaffa known thus far is gone, replaced by a fractured version of himself. This transformation

underscores the novel's themes of sacrifice, identity, and the corrupting nature of power, setting the stage for his altered role in the narrative.

Chapter 4: you are challenged

The protagonist, exhausted from summoning an obelisk, falls into a deep sleep in their sparse Castrima apartment. Upon waking, they find Hoa asleep beside them and Tonkee snoring nearby, feeling unusually rested but hungry. They discover a satchel of communal food, including unfamiliar mushrooms, but hesitate to eat them, opting instead for their own meager provisions. As they eat, they reflect on the toll of obelisk summoning, dismissing an odd scraping sound outside until realizing it’s actually screams of distress.

Curiosity draws the protagonist to investigate the commotion outside their apartment. Castrima’s bustling, shift-based society is in motion, but the focus shifts to a group rushing an injured person toward the infirmary. Despite initial indifference—rationalizing that death is common during the Season—the protagonist is jolted into action when someone urgently calls for Lerna, the healer. Hoa’s pitying expression further spurs them to join the crowd heading toward the infirmary.

Inside the infirmary, the protagonist witnesses the chaotic scene as Lerna and another healer struggle to treat a man writhing in agony. The man’s screams are silenced only after a syringe is administered, leaving an eerie quiet. The protagonist, recognized by the crowd due to their growing reputation, moves closer to observe. They note Alabaster, seemingly ignored in the far corner, before focusing on the injured man, whose legs reveal strange, blue-tinged wounds.

The chapter culminates in a grim discovery as Lerna cuts open the man’s pants, exposing bizarre, hemispherical lesions on his skin. The protagonist’s curiosity and empathy override their earlier detachment, hinting at their deepening connection to Castrima’s community. The scene underscores the harsh realities of life in the Season, blending personal exhaustion with collective survival, while foreshadowing darker mysteries tied to the man’s unexplained injuries.

Chapter 5: Nassun takes the reins

In this chapter, Nassun reflects on her conflicted feelings toward her parents while traveling with her father in a wagon. She resents her mother, Jija, for forcing her to lie about her orogenic abilities and for her harsh, controlling behavior. In contrast, she idolizes her father, who has shown her kindness and patience, though she is disturbed by his current anger and grief over killing her younger brother, Uche. Nassun blames her mother for her father's emotional distance and attempts to reconnect with him by confessing her withheld truths, seeking his approval despite her fear.

Nassun's internal struggle highlights the toxic dynamics of her family. Her mother's relentless demands and punishments contrast sharply with her father's gentler, more affectionate parenting. Yet, his violent outburst—knocking Nassun off the wagon in a moment of rage—reveals his own instability. Afterward, he collapses into remorse, clutching her and sobbing, revealing his grief over Uche's death and his fear of losing Nassun too. This moment of vulnerability reassures Nassun of his love, even as it underscores the trauma binding them.

Their emotional turmoil is interrupted by a catastrophic seismic event—a continental rift triggered far north. Nassun, still dazed from her fall, instinctively locks up instead of using her orogeny to mitigate the disaster. Her father senses the impending danger but is powerless to act. The chapter ends mid-action as Nassun, despite her disorientation, attempts to anchor herself and her father against the overwhelming force of the quake, hinting at her latent power and resilience.

The chapter explores themes of familial love, abuse, and survival, with Nassun caught between her parents' flaws and her own emerging agency. The seismic disaster mirrors the upheaval in her personal life, setting the stage for her growth as an orogene. The narrative balances intimate character moments with high-stakes action, emphasizing how external and internal forces shape Nassun's journey.

Chapter 6: you commit to the cause

The chapter opens with the protagonist assisting the comm’s work shifts, attempting to integrate into the community under Ykka’s guidance. They also encourage Tonkee, who has been idle, to contribute. Tonkee is preoccupied with cutting her matted hair, a remnant of her time living without a comm. The protagonist mentions Alabaster’s cryptic reference to a "moon," which Tonkee dismisses, though she explains the concept of satellites—objects dependent on a primary, like the obelisks that follow the protagonist. This leads to a discussion of the obelisks’ behavior, with Tonkee describing them as drawn to the protagonist’s presence, though she avoids attributing intentionality to them.

The protagonist reflects on the obelisks as metaphorical chains, recalling their ties to the Fulcrum and its Guardians. Tonkee clarifies that the obelisks’ connection is more like gravity than force, reacting to the protagonist’s influence. As Tonkee continues cutting her hair, the protagonist notices her resemblance to their shared past, hinting at Tonkee’s family background. The conversation shifts to the obelisks’ origins, with the protagonist questioning whether they were built or grown in the socket found at the Fulcrum. Tonkee’s excitement resurfaces as she speculates about the socket’s purpose, suggesting it might have adapted to fit different obelisks.

Tonkee reveals she stole her family’s secrets, including maps and artifacts, to uncover the truth about the obelisks. She dismisses some family legends as myth but acknowledges the obelisks’ ancient origins, predating recorded history. The protagonist remains skeptical, viewing Yumenes’ leadership as self-justifying. Tonkee describes strange artifacts she found, like a yellow stone with dangerous properties, hinting at hidden knowledge. Her determination to "harden" soft knowledge into tangible evidence drives her actions, including infiltrating the Fulcrum to locate the socket mentioned in her family’s maps.

The chapter concludes with Tonkee asserting that some family stories hold truth, particularly about the obelisks’ age, possibly dating back to the Shattering. The protagonist remains doubtful but engaged, considering the implications of Tonkee’s claims. The dialogue underscores the tension between myth and evidence, with Tonkee’s relentless curiosity contrasting with the protagonist’s wariness. The chapter leaves unanswered questions about the obelisks’ nature and their connection to the protagonist, setting the stage for further exploration of the world’s mysteries.

Chapter 7: Nassun finds the moon

Nassun and her father, Jija, embark on a perilous journey south, outpacing Essun due to their horse-drawn cart. They barter rides for supplies, avoiding the worst of the climate chaos and predatory creatures. Passing Castrima-over, Nassun barely senses Ykka’s summons in a dream, sparing them from potential traps. Some communities they encounter remain hopeful, resisting Seasonal Law, though Nassun knows the devastation is inevitable. Jija’s resilience and skills make him valuable, but he refuses all offers to stay, driven by an undisclosed destination. Their survival hinges on speed and caution, though danger lurks in every stop.

Their journey grows darker as some communities turn hostile, attacking without reason. Jija fights their way out of one ambush, losing their cart and horses but escaping alive. In another encounter, Nassun unleashes her latent power, freezing an entire community to save themselves. The aftermath leaves Jija visibly disturbed, and they briefly rest among the frozen dead before moving on. Nassun’s abilities become a double-edged sword—protective yet alienating. Hunger and hardship persist, but she grows taller, her body adapting despite the relentless challenges.

As they near the Antarctics, Jija’s secretive behavior hints at a deeper purpose. After whispered conversations with locals, Nassun overhears him mention "the Moon," a cryptic reference she doesn’t understand. The tension escalates when Jija trades intimacy for information, leaving Nassun to feign sleep. The landscape shifts to lush, volcanic terrain, alive with geothermal activity. Nassun senses the earth’s energy, a stark contrast to the desolation behind them. The Antarctic’s sparse population and harsh winters loom, yet the path ahead feels strangely vibrant.

The chapter culminates as they discover a bizarre rock formation—a towering, ribbon-like structure leading to a hidden plateau. Nassun senses an inexplicable pull, mirroring Jija’s fixation. The formation hints at a settlement, but the ascent seems

treacherous. Nassun’s growing awareness of her power and the unknown destination foreshadow a pivotal turning point. The chapter closes with an unspoken tension between father and daughter, their shared journey teetering between survival and something far more profound.

Chapter 8: you’ve been warned

The chapter opens with the protagonist overhearing a tense conversation among Castrima’s residents, hinting at underlying tensions between newcomers and long-standing members. The older man’s muttered complaints about the influx of orogenes—people with earth-manipulating abilities—reveals a divide in the community. The protagonist, still reeling from the loss of their daughter Nassun, observes the geode’s strange mix of overcrowding and emptiness, noting how Castrima’s population has swelled with refugees and recruits. Ykka, the community’s leader, has prioritized bringing in orogenes and those willing to coexist with them, creating a fragile dynamic between old and new residents.

The chapter delves into the social fabric of Castrima, highlighting the diverse backgrounds of its inhabitants. Some newcomers, like Lerna, were forcibly recruited for their skills, while others, desperate after their comms were destroyed, are eager to prove their worth. The protagonist reflects on the unusual freedom of being judged by actions rather than innate traits, a stark contrast to their past experiences. However, resentment lingers among original Castrimans, who grudgingly accept the necessity of orogenes for survival but remain wary of the changes. The community’s survival hinges on this uneasy balance, with Ykka’s leadership tested by these tensions.

Daily life in Castrima is portrayed through the protagonist’s routine, from tending water gardens to participating in advisory meetings. These mundane tasks, like debating petty disputes or resource management, evoke a sense of normalcy and belonging the protagonist rarely experienced. The meetings, though tedious, remind them of familial arguments, offering a bittersweet connection to their past. The chapter underscores the irony of finding solace in trivialities amid a world shattered by cataclysmic events, emphasizing the human need for routine and purpose even in chaos.

The chapter closes with a poignant scene atop Castrima, where the protagonist and others observe a shift in the ash-filled sky. A guard’s hopeful remark about improving conditions contrasts with the protagonist’s silent awareness of the sulfur-laden clouds—a harbinger of potential disaster. The shared but unspoken knowledge between the protagonist and Cutter highlights the burden of foresight and the compassion in withholding grim truths. This moment encapsulates the chapter’s themes of resilience, community, and the delicate balance between hope and harsh reality in a fractured world.

Chapter 9: Nassun, needed

The chapter focuses on Nassun, the daughter of Essun, as she and her father, Jija, settle into Found Moon, a repurposed section of the declining comm of Jekity. Once a thriving city, Jekity was nearly destroyed a century earlier by a combination of natural disaster and human error, leaving it a shadow of its former self. Nassun finds a sense of belonging in Found Moon, which becomes her first true home. The community, though small and struggling, accepts Jija due to his skills as a stoneknapper, and he is formally inducted into the comm after proving his worth. Nassun, however, remains an outsider in some ways, though she is embraced by the other orogene children.

Found Moon is revealed to be a Guardian-run facility within Jekity, established by Schaffa to train young orogenes. The compound, built from repurposed structures, includes living quarters, a practice area, and storage sheds. Nassun is introduced to the other orogene children, who come from diverse backgrounds and regions, each with unique traits and struggles. Among them is Eitz, an older boy who welcomes Nassun and explains that Found Moon is a safe space for orogenes, much like the Fulcrum in Yumenes. The children’s camaraderie helps Nassun feel accepted, though tensions occasionally arise due to differences in upbringing and personality.

The chapter highlights the dynamics among the orogene children, emphasizing their shared experiences despite their varied origins. Nassun forms quick bonds with some, like the Westcoaster sisters Oegin and Ynegen, while others, like Lashar, remain distant or hostile. The children’s interactions reveal the complexities of their identities, shaped by both their orogeny and their pre-Guardian lives. Deshati, for instance, relates to Nassun’s father’s profession, while Wudeh’s frailty contrasts with his strong orogenic abilities. These relationships underscore the theme of found family and the struggle for acceptance in a world that fears orogenes.

The chapter concludes with Nassun’s integration into Found Moon, where she begins to find her place among the other children. While Jija is celebrated for his contributions to Jekity, Nassun’s identity remains tied to her orogeny, which both isolates and connects her. The Guardians, particularly Schaffa, play a pivotal role in shaping this new community, offering protection and purpose. The chapter sets the stage for Nassun’s growth and the challenges she will face as she navigates her abilities and relationships in this unconventional home.

Chapter 10: you’ve got a big job ahead of you

The chapter delves into the complex relationship between the narrator and Alabaster, exploring themes of identity, defiance, and survival. The narrator reflects on their past perception of Alabaster as "crazy," realizing this label was a way to distance themselves from the truth: that roggas who resist oppression are often dismissed as irrational. Alabaster’s refusal to obey unjust systems taught the narrator that compliance offers no safety, ultimately inspiring their own courage. The emotional weight of their bond is underscored by shared grief and trauma, particularly over the loss of Innon, whose death at the hands of the Guardians left both deeply scarred.

Alabaster recounts his harrowing journey after being taken by Antimony, describing how he was dragged deep into the earth and nearly consumed by stone. His survival, though miraculous, left him physically and emotionally shattered. The narrative shifts to his discovery of Corepoint, a mysterious, ancient city on the opposite side of the world. This city, built around a gaping hole leading into a volcano, is a relic of a long-lost civilization, preserved in eerie perfection. Alabaster’s awe and sorrow are palpable as he contrasts humanity’s current struggle for survival with the advanced achievements of their ancestors.

Corepoint’s existence challenges the characters’ understanding of history and human potential. Alabaster describes the city’s strange, functioning infrastructure and its inhabitants—stone eaters who seem both fascinated and repelled by him. His time there is marked by isolation and a desperate search for meaning, as he grapples with the stone eaters’ motives and his own purpose. The city becomes a symbol of what humanity once was and what it has lost, evoking a profound sense of melancholy in Alabaster, who mourns not only his personal losses but the decline of civilization itself.

The chapter concludes with Alabaster’s strained attempts to communicate with the stone eaters, highlighting the cultural and linguistic divide between them. His

frustration and curiosity mirror the narrator’s own journey of understanding, as both confront the limits of their knowledge and the vast unknowns of their world. The narrative leaves lingering questions about Corepoint’s significance and the role it may play in the larger conflict, while emphasizing the emotional and psychological toll of their experiences. The bond between Alabaster and the narrator remains central, forged through shared suffering and a relentless pursuit of truth.

Chapter 11: Schaffa, lying down

The chapter delves into the fragmented dreams of Schaffa, a Guardian whose altered physiology rarely allows him to sleep deeply. When he does dream, his mind struggles with the remnants of his identity, revealing disjointed memories and emotions. Schaffa reflects on the unnatural nature of Guardians, who are deprived of ordinary dreaming-sleep yet seem perpetually mad. His increasing dreams are a troubling sign, hinting at the cost of his choices. The narrative captures his physical and mental torment as he thrashes in bed, grappling with visions that offer glimpses of his fractured past and the weight of his transformed existence.

Schaffa’s dreams oscillate between haunting memories and unsettling realizations. He recalls fleeting images of two people—likely his parents—though their significance is lost to him. Another memory surfaces of his brutal transformation as a child, where an iron sliver is implanted into his neck, repurposing his sessapinae and subjecting him to perpetual pain. The trauma of this event is juxtaposed with his later role as a Guardian, overseeing the harsh training of orogene children. These memories underscore the duality of his existence: both victim and enforcer, shaped by cruelty yet perpetuating it.

The chapter also explores Schaffa’s strained relationship with humanity. A fleeting encounter with a woman at an inn ends in violence, reinforcing his awareness of his inhuman nature. His interactions with fellow Guardian Leshet further highlight his internal conflict, as her aging and kindness provoke his disgust and violence. Yet, amidst his brutality, Schaffa harbors a twisted affection for one particular orogene girl, whose resilience fills him with pride. This contradiction reveals the complexity of his character—capable of both tenderness and ruthlessness, bound by duty yet yearning for connection.

The chapter concludes with Schaffa waking from his dreams, disoriented and burdened by his fragmented identity. He observes the other Guardians, noting their shared corruption and the blurring lines between them. Despite his self-awareness, he suppresses his turmoil and resumes his duties, heading outside to check on the children. This ending underscores the cyclical nature of his existence, trapped between his past and his role, forever haunted by the consequences of his choices.

Chapter 12: Nassun, falling up

The chapter delves into Nassun’s growing mastery of orogeny and her unique connection to the mysterious "silver" energy within the earth. Unlike her peers at Found Moon, Nassun embraces her abilities without fear, guided by Schaffa’s encouragement. She explores the earth’s movements with ease, discovering the silver—a phenomenon others cannot perceive. Her curiosity leads her to question the Guardians, who reveal that the Fulcrum once suppressed this skill, hinting at its dangerous potential. Nassun’s independence and confidence mark a stark contrast to her earlier self, reflecting her transformation under Schaffa’s mentorship.

Nassun’s interactions with the other orogenes and Guardians highlight the tension surrounding the silver. While Eitz briefly senses it, the Guardians Nida and Umber provide cryptic explanations, suggesting the Fulcrum selectively allowed its development for breeding or research. Nassun pieces together that Schaffa and his allies have abandoned their old orders, allowing her to explore the silver freely. Schaffa’s silent presence during these discussions, coupled with his physical reactions to the silver, adds an air of mystery, leaving Nassun—and the reader—to wonder about his true motives and the nature of the silver.

At home, Nassun finds a fragile sense of normalcy with her father, Jija, who has settled into their new life in Jekity. Their domestic routine is punctuated by small comforts, like a painted door or a rug in her room, but underlying tensions remain. When Nassun mentions Eitz, Jija’s hostility toward orogenes resurfaces, revealing his deep-seated prejudice. His anger at Eitz for not "curing" himself of orogeny underscores his denial of Nassun’s identity, setting the stage for future conflict between her newfound freedom and her father’s expectations.

The chapter juxtaposes Nassun’s burgeoning self-acceptance with the looming threat of Jija’s rejection. Her fascination with the sea, described through Eitz’s stories,

symbolizes her longing for the unknown and her desire to explore beyond her current confines. Yet, Jija’s reaction to her connection with other orogenes foreshadows the inevitable clash between her destiny and his narrow worldview. Nassun’s journey is one of empowerment, but the chapter leaves unanswered questions about the silver’s significance and the true cost of her freedom.

Chapter 13: you, amid relics

The protagonist reflects on their life in Castrima, a community where their identity as an orogene is openly acknowledged—a rare luxury compared to past experiences. While adjusting to this new environment, they observe the harsh landscape, noting the proliferation of boilbug mounds, a potential threat. Teaching a group of young orogenes, they emphasize practical survival skills over theoretical knowledge, aware that the children must learn quickly to navigate a world that may turn against them. The protagonist's methods are harsh but necessary, driven by the urgency of the ongoing Season and the need for self-preservation.

During a training session, the protagonist demonstrates advanced orogenic techniques, correcting the children's mistakes with stern discipline. One near-fatal error prompts a forceful lesson on the consequences of carelessness. The children's mixed reactions—fear, resentment, and subdued obedience—highlight the tension between survival and compassion. The protagonist grapples with guilt, recalling past failures with their own children, Nassun and Uche, and the unresolved regrets that weigh heavily on them. The chapter underscores the brutal reality of their world, where kindness is a luxury and survival demands sacrifice.

Later, the protagonist discusses their teaching methods with Alabaster, who critiques their approach as inefficient and misguided. Alabaster argues that the children's rudimentary training detracts from the protagonist's own advanced lessons, which are crucial for mastering deeper orogenic abilities. His disdain for the children's potential contrasts with the protagonist's defensive pride in their students, sparking a brief but revealing exchange. Alabaster's criticism forces the protagonist to confront the limitations of their current path, both as a teacher and a learner.

The chapter closes with Alabaster revealing a critical flaw in the protagonist's training: their focus on practical skills has dulled their sensitivity to finer orogenic

manipulations. This setback underscores the tension between immediate survival and long-term mastery, mirroring the broader struggle of life in a fractured world. The protagonist’s frustration and Alabaster’s cryptic insights hint at deeper mysteries yet to be unraveled, leaving the reader with a sense of unresolved tension and impending revelation.

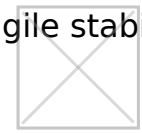
Chapter 14: you’re invited!

The chapter depicts six months of life in Castrima, a survival shelter powered by ancient magic, where the protagonist and others adapt to a monotonous existence marked by makeshift routines. Tonkee, despite surviving a severe arm infection after reattachment, remains abrasive and unrepentant, though her survival is partly due to the protagonist’s intervention. Relationships shift as Lerna, the medic, begins to reconcile with the protagonist, recognizing her capacity for mercy despite her violent past. Meanwhile, Hjarka’s unexpected courtship of Tonkee, initially met with confusion, eventually blossoms into a physical relationship, adding a layer of personal connection to the otherwise harsh environment.

Tonkee’s efforts to prove her worth to Castrima’s leader, Ykka, lead her to develop a grim predictive model: the community faces impending protein deprivation, which could result in cannibalism if not addressed. Her blunt delivery earns no gratitude, highlighting the tension between her and Ykka. The protagonist, however, acknowledges Tonkee’s contribution, underscoring their complex bond. Meanwhile, the protagonist shifts her focus to teaching orogeny, training Cutter and delegating children’s lessons, finding solace in this role despite the broader challenges facing the comm.

Castrima’s internal dynamics grow more fraught as Ykka’s leadership decisions spark conflict, particularly over an unauthorized pregnancy. The protagonist clashes with Ykka over the latter’s callous remarks about Alabaster’s impending death, revealing deep-seated tensions. However, the confrontation inadvertently strengthens the community’s trust in the protagonist, as her emotional outburst demonstrates her control over her powers. The Breeders’ intervention to allocate resources for the unborn child temporarily resolves the dispute, though their optimism contrasts with the looming protein crisis Ykka keeps secret.

The chapter closes with a Breeder attempting to recruit the protagonist for reproduction, flattering her fertility and resilience. This encounter triggers painful memories of her past, leading to an outburst and a subsequent visit to Alabaster for a lesson. The scene underscores the protagonist’s weariness and the cyclical nature of survival in Castrima, where personal struggles intertwine with communal survival. The chapter balances moments of connection with the ever-present threat of collapse, reflecting the fragile stability of life in the Stillness.



Chapter 15: Nassun, in rejection

The chapter opens with Nassun reflecting on her childhood memories, dominated by vivid colors, as she sits in the Antarctic Fulcrum with Schaffa and Umber. They are meeting with three senior orogenes, who wear black uniforms reminiscent of Imperial Orogenes. Nassun observes their discomfort and fear, particularly focusing on Serpentine, whose shaky hands and whining tone remind her of her mother's duplicity. The seniors explain their struggles with resource shortages and their decision to house unparented children and refugees, though their forced politeness and underlying tension unsettle Nassun.

Schaffa and Umber's reactions reveal their disapproval of the Fulcrum's operations during the Season, a time when orogenes are expected to self-terminate to conserve resources. Nassun notices the seniors' defensiveness as they justify their survival strategies, such as trading with local communities and mitigating seismic activity. The six-ringed orogene, who resembles Nassun's mother, challenges Schaffa directly, questioning the authority behind Seasonal Law. The exchange highlights the tension between the Fulcrum's independence and the Guardians' traditional control over orogenes.

The discussion turns darker as Schaffa clarifies the grim protocol: orogenes are expected to die during a Season to prioritize "normal" people's survival. Nassun is shocked by this revelation, and Serpentine taunts Schaffa about her discomfort. Schaffa defends Nassun, emphasizing his transparency with her, which strengthens her loyalty. The seniors argue that their self-sufficiency and contributions to the Antarctic comms make them exceptions to the rule, but Umber subtly implies their actions defy Guardian oversight. The power struggle between the two groups becomes increasingly apparent.

The chapter concludes with Serpentine asserting the Antarctic Fulcrum’s autonomy, noting its small size and lack of permanent Guardians. The seniors’ defiance and resourcefulness contrast sharply with the Guardians’ expectations, leaving Nassun to grapple with the moral implications of orogene survival. The encounter deepens her understanding of her mother’s complexities and the systemic oppression faced by orogenes, setting the stage for her growing disillusionment with the Fulcrum’s hierarchy.

Chapter 16: you meet an old friend, again

The chapter begins with an intimate narrative style, as the voice addresses the reader directly, acknowledging the rudeness of imposing its perspective. Essun encounters Hoa, a stone eater who has emerged from a chalcedony chrysalis, now in a transformed, marbled-black form with unsettling ice-white eyes. Despite his altered appearance, Essun recognizes Hoa’s familiar features and the anxiety in his expression. Their reunion is tense, marked by Essun’s probing questions about his true nature and past, to which Hoa responds cryptically, asserting his humanity despite his current form.

Essun and Hoa engage in a dialogue that reveals their complex relationship. Hoa explains that his human form was a temporary guise, chosen for her benefit, and admits to being trapped in an obelisk after angering another stone eater. The conversation shifts to the dangers Hoa has faced, including a violent confrontation with a group of stone eaters, one of whom nearly defeated him. Essun reflects on her own actions, feeling a sense of vengeance for Hoa’s injuries. The exchange highlights their mutual protectiveness, even as Essun grapples with the unsettling reality of Hoa’s true nature.

The chapter delves deeper into Hoa’s motivations and the threats surrounding Essun. Hoa reveals that some stone eaters seek to kill or manipulate her, and he vows to prevent both outcomes. Essun questions his loyalty, leading to a startling realization: Hoa has consumed other stone eaters, including those previously known to her. This revelation shocks Essun, forcing her to confront the darker aspects of Hoa’s existence and the lengths he has gone to protect her. The tension between trust and fear underscores their dynamic.

In the final section, Essun and Hoa’s conversation becomes more introspective. Hoa’s tone carries resignation, as if he accepts that Essun may never fully trust him again.

Essun, meanwhile, struggles to reconcile her fond memories of Hoa as a child with his current, more formidable presence. The chapter closes with a sense of unease, as Essun processes the implications of Hoa’s actions and the looming threats from other stone eaters. Their bond, though strained, remains rooted in a shared history and mutual dependence.

Chapter 17: Nassun, versus

Nassun discovers a newfound ability to heal by manipulating silver threads within living beings, a skill she hones through practice in the forest. She learns to detect and correct abnormalities in plants and animals, such as removing growths from a grub or adjusting the curvature of melon leaves. Though her early attempts are imperfect—some subjects die—she gradually refines her technique, particularly in treating brain-related issues, like fungal infections in ants. This practice culminates in her healing a raider’s infected hand, though she ultimately kills the woman to prevent future threats, demonstrating both her growing power and moral complexity.

Elated by her success, Nassun rushes to share her breakthrough with Schaffa, her guardian and mentor. Despite the cold stares from other children at Found Moon—still wary after her accidental killing of Eitz—she remains focused on her goal. She finds Schaffa training Wudeh, another child with orogenic potential, though his progress is slow and physically taxing. Nassun politely assists Wudeh, reflecting Schaffa’s influence on her behavior, but her eagerness to help Schaffa with his own affliction is palpable.

Nassun reveals to Schaffa that she believes she can remove the painful, controlling presence within him—a force that compels him to harm her. Though she knows the risk of experimenting on him, her confidence in her abilities and her love for him outweigh her fear. Schaffa, amused yet intrigued, listens as she explains her plan, showcasing her maturity and determination. Their relationship, fraught with danger and devotion, underscores the chapter’s tension between trust and the looming threat of violence.

The chapter highlights Nassun’s evolution from a traumatized child to a skilled and assertive young orogene. Her healing abilities symbolize both hope and peril, as she navigates ethical dilemmas and the consequences of her power. The dynamic between

Nassun and Schaffa remains central, blending tenderness with the ever-present risk of betrayal. Her journey reflects broader themes of agency, sacrifice, and the ambiguous nature of redemption in a harsh world.

Chapter 18: you, counting down

The chapter opens with a tense conversation between Essun and an unnamed narrator, who reveals that the Gray Man’s true intention is not to prevent the opening of the Obelisk Gate but to manipulate someone into opening it for his own purposes. Essun, wary yet resigned, understands that her inability to be controlled makes her a target. The narrator warns that if Essun cannot be used, she will be eliminated, as her actions could restore the Moon and end the catastrophic Seasons. This confrontation leaves Essun burdened with the weight of her role in the unfolding conflict.

Seeking solace, Essun visits Alabaster, who is now physically diminished and reliant on Antimony for support. Their conversation reveals Alabaster’s past efforts to fight for Meov, driven by the slim hope of a normal life for Essun and their family. Despite the inevitability of betrayal, Alabaster insists that any chance was worth taking. His words resonate with Essun, inspiring her to attempt salvaging Castrima’s fragile community, even as she grapples with her own cynicism and despair.

As Castrima prepares for a critical vote in response to Rennanis’s ultimatum, Essun quietly mobilizes the comm’s roggas, instructing them to stay vigilant and protect one another. She distrusts the community’s loyalty but follows through with Ykka’s orders, even as she avoids relying on Cutter, whose offer to guard her unsettles her. Essun’s actions reflect her internal conflict—balancing self-preservation with a reluctant commitment to Castrima’s survival.

The chapter culminates in chaos as Essun awakens to the sounds of an angry mob gathering near the baths. Ykka rushes to intervene, while Essun, pragmatic yet prepared for the worst, follows with supplies in hand. The scene underscores the precariousness of Castrima’s unity and the inevitability of violence, leaving Essun and the reader bracing for the impending crisis.

Chapter 19: you get ready to rumble

The chapter opens with the protagonist reflecting on the passage of time and the recent death of Alabaster, setting a tense tone as Castrima-over faces imminent threat from Rennanis forces. The comm’s tunnels are sealed off by orogenes, and the Strongbacks look to the protagonist as their last hope. Ykka, the headwoman, expresses concerns about the enemy’s stone eaters and the vulnerability of Castrima’s ventilation ducts. Despite their strained relationship due to the protagonist’s earlier decisions, Ykka acknowledges her as a crucial asset in the coming conflict.

As the protagonist moves through Castrima-over, the devastation of the ongoing Season is evident: ash blankets the comm, and Rennanis soldiers, now a unified tribe, occupy the area. The protagonist stands out starkly amid the gray, their colorful attire and the mysterious spinel floating behind them drawing attention. The spinel’s eerie behavior unnerves the enemy, hinting at the protagonist’s latent power. The soldiers, though ordinary in appearance, are marked by their Sanzed heritage and tribal insignias, underscoring their collective identity and threat.

The protagonist arrives at the comm’s central pavilion, now repurposed as Rennanis’s operations center. Maps reveal the enemy’s knowledge of Castrima’s ventilation ducts, a critical vulnerability. The leader of the Rennanis forces, an unassuming yet formidable woman, greets the protagonist with cold indifference, instantly dehumanizing them as a rogga. This moment highlights the deep-seated prejudice against orogenes, contrasting with the protagonist’s inability to reciprocate such detachment. The tension escalates as both sides prepare for a confrontation.

The chapter culminates in a stark realization of the stakes: the protagonist must fight not just for survival but for the survival of Castrima’s people. The enemy’s indifference and the protagonist’s resolve underscore the emotional and strategic weight of the impending clash. The spinel’s presence and the protagonist’s unique abilities hint at a

pivotal role in the coming battle, leaving the reader anticipating the inevitable confrontation between the two forces.

Chapter 20: Nassun, faceted

The chapter opens with an enigmatic narrator describing how they and others like them sense and influence the activation of obelisks, ancient and powerful artifacts. Nassun, a young girl with latent magical abilities, awakens at dawn, drawn by an unsettling sensation emanating from the north. She perceives a vast, interconnected network of obelisks resonating with immense power, which Steel, a stone eater, identifies as the opening of the Obelisk Gate. He reveals that Nassun’s mother, Essun, is channeling this power for destructive purposes, echoing the misguided actions of the Gate’s original creators.

Nassun reflects on the cyclical nature of oppression and violence, recognizing how the weak manipulate the strong until both are broken. She confronts the harsh reality that no one will save her—she must seize her own freedom. This realization coincides with the arrival of her father, Jija, who stands armed with a knife, his cold demeanor betraying his intent to harm her. Nassun, resigned to his hatred, expresses her sorrow that he could never love her despite her flaws, contrasting his cruelty with the unconditional love of her guardian, Schaffa.

As Jija lunges to attack, Nassun instinctively commands the sapphire obelisk, which transforms into a weapon and intervenes, crashing to the ground with thunderous force. The obelisk’s power merges with Nassun, granting her a fleeting connection to the broader network of the Obelisk Gate. In this moment, she wavers, giving her father a final chance to retreat, but his hesitation is brief. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving Nassun’s fate unresolved as she stands poised between survival and vengeance.

The chapter explores themes of power, betrayal, and the struggle for autonomy, juxtaposing Nassun’s emotional turmoil with the cosmic scale of the Obelisk Gate’s activation. Her confrontation with Jija underscores the destructive cycles of familial and

societal violence, while her connection to the obelisks hints at her potential to transcend these patterns. The narrative maintains a tense, introspective tone, blending personal drama with mythic stakes.