The Lands Below

AN ILLUSTRATED FIELD GUIDE

Follow the waterways and stone ways of the Lands Below, from the roots of the broken Tree to the southern wastes.



The Running Flow leaves the Great Waters and bends past the Tree toward Kethra. Miravaesh lies to the northwest. To the east, the woods thicken into the Deep Green.

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The Broken World Tree



What remains of the Sacred Tree stands as a memorial to the friends, families, and homes lost in the Splitting. Its Light has not been seen since.

Landmarks around the Tree

Scar Lands and Cracks A dry maze of fractured stone, narrow passages, and vibrant blue energy.

Running Flow Fed by the Great Waters, the river winds around the Tree toward the branching waters of Kethra.

The Giving Stone An unclimbed, symmetrical monument from Before. Water sometimes falls from its top.

The Black Ring A vast amphitheater of unknown black material, avoided by living creatures.

The Walking Way Ancient stoneways from Before, surviving in broken stretches. Part has collapsed near Kethra.

The Dirt and Rock Wilds Barren crags and plateaus, home to Rix and Glows. The Ah'hani Borus know its safe routes.

Kethra

The Market



Under the market awnings, a mineral-blue baker speaks with a shopper. Two children stop in the shade to watch a reedew. The market draws Keth from across the city.

The Great Steps



Nine stone terraces climb from the plaza to the elders' round pavilion, one for each light of darkness the Keth endured in the After. The stair winds past gardens and water channels, with glyphs cut into the stone along the way.

Keth

At the Market





The Keth descend from those who dwelt beneath the Tree and lived through the nine lights of darkness in the After. They held to the ways of Before and gave sanctuary to other peoples who sought it. Their builders and craftspeople carry those ways forward in Kethra, where everyone and everything has a place.

The Keth have four arms and wear layers of woven cloth. Their builders discovered the stones that light Kethra.

Dorrin



The Dorrin were the first to find refuge among the Keth in the After. They have lived side by side in Kethra ever since. Dorrin often stand a little taller than other Keth and have sturdier builds. They have four arms, four tapered toes on each foot, and deep mineral-blue skin with darker mottling. They wear Kethra’s woven clothes, and some Keth of mixed kin share these features.

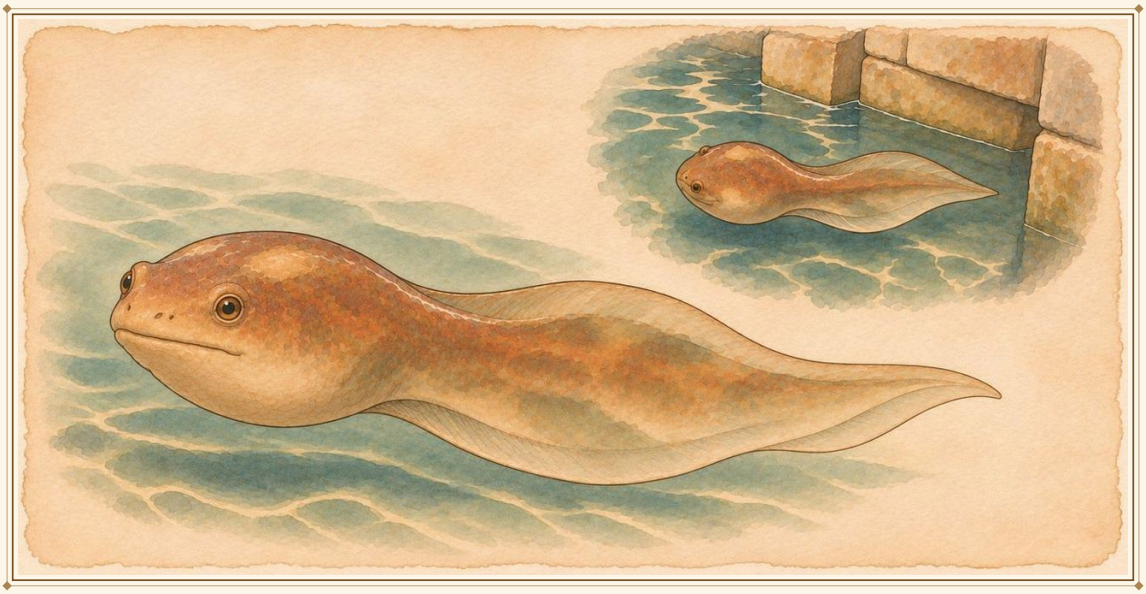
Flopk and Polon

Flopk



Flopk lurk in Kethra’s western cisterns. The orange ones have broad mouths, pale throats, and two horns that sweep back over their eyes.

Polon



A watcher at the western cisterns can tell a polon by the sweep of its tail beneath the water. The russet young there have longer, tapering tails.

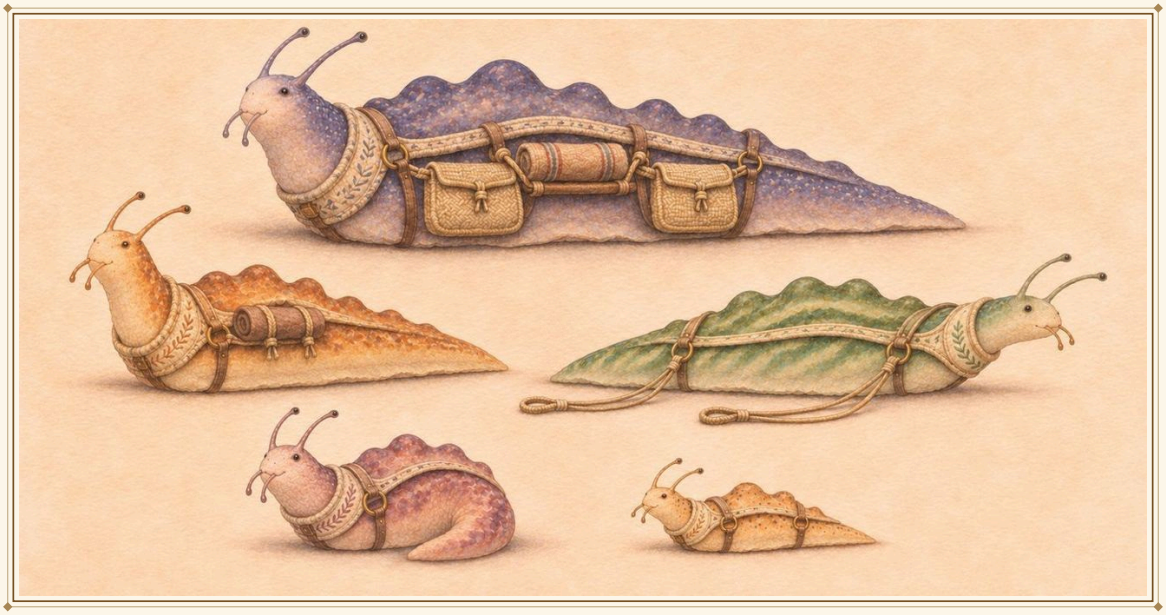
Reedew and Gullimog

Reedew



Keth children play with reedew, small, round creatures with bright coats and curled feelers. The Keth keep them as pets and make sugar from the sweet liquid they give off.

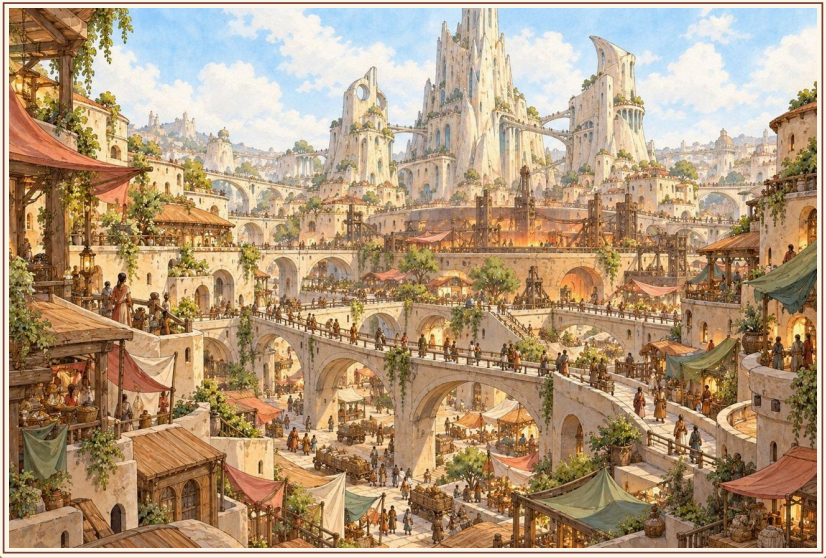
Gullimog



Gullimogs carry loads and riders through Kethra. These gentle beasts have two long eyestalks and two short feelers. Their harnesses fit around the bumps along their backs.

Miravaesh

The Upper Terraces



Bridges span the gaps between terraces high above the market streets. Three towers rise over the city. One opens in a ring at its crown, the tallest carries a cluster of spires, and the third ends in a swept crest.

The Gate Toward Dark



As the light fades, travelers pass beneath the arched gate. Lamps pick out the threshold and the nearest stalls. The wall follows the hillside below the houses and gardens that climb toward the towers.

Vaesh

Everyday Clothing



The Splitting cast the Vaesh from the skies. On the rocky slopes to the northwest, generations of their warriors, metalworkers, and builders raised Miravaesh. They prize readiness and competence. All Vaesh have wings, though few can still take to the sky.

Their long, narrow wings can rest close beneath their clothes. Warm red markings show along the face and limbs. Everyday clothing includes woven wraps, sashes, and open sandals.

Guard Clothing and Armor



Vaesh guards wear red and cream wraps over dark armor. Heavier armor has plates at the shoulders, forearms, and legs.

Maevira and the Royal Guard



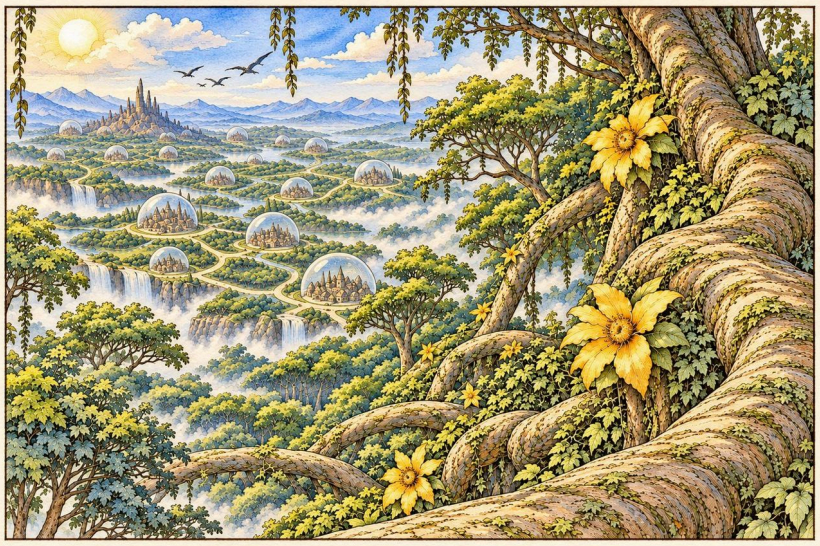
Maevira at left and a Royal Guard at right.

Maevira is Queen Mother of the Vaesh. She is still a youngling, yet she commands all the might her station demands. Her love for her people is the source of her brutal strength. Only her impatience surpasses it. Some call her the Laughing Calamity, and they are not wrong.

Maevira and her Royal Guard are among the finest of the fighting Vaesh. All have wings that can carry them into the sky. Her Guard answer only to her. They are chosen young, once their wings have proven capable of flight, and trained for her service.

The Green

The Domed Settlements



Domes shelter settlements across the valleys of the Green. Water winds between them and spills over the cliffs. The Great Waters lie to the north, and the woods grow deeper eastward around the Stilling Pool.

The Lantern Procession



Neenu, Mellun, and Saelith follow the water by lantern light. Their lamps catch woven reed hats and folded wings. Across the water, a pale building nearly disappears in the rain.

Mellun and Neenu





A Mellun with rounded amber wings at left and a Neenu hunter at right.

Mellun

The lighthearted Mellun keep order through simplicity and tradition. Many make their home in the Green, where they produce the finest honeys and honeybrews. Though they can fly, they often stay near the flowering caps beneath the yaro trees.

Fine banded fur and four rounded wings distinguish the Mellun. The broad upper pair sits above the smaller lower pair.

Neenu

It is a good day for the Neenu when a broad yaro leaf falls on the waters of the Green. They build their homes on those leaves and walk across the water with ease. Fishers in broad woven hats carry long, barbed reed spears to catch polons.

Saelith



Formidable and often arrogant, the Saelith guard the Deep Green in the east. The waters around the Tree were once their home, and few peoples suffered as greatly in the Splitting. They venture beyond the Green only to settle old scores. They remember the old ways more than most, and they remember old wounds as debts to be paid.

Saelith have two arms and four translucent wings, with a larger pair above a smaller pair. Small patches of scales catch the light along their cheeks, shoulders, and limbs. They wear Greenwear fashioned from leaves that shed water. Their warriors are known as Stalkers and Scouts.



A Stalker and a Scout stand beside the water.

Flopk and Polon

Flopk



Flopk lurk in the swampy waterways of the Green, where they harass workers and travelers. Their round bodies are mottled in slate-blue and copper, with short, tucked legs and horns above the eyes.

Polon



Polons are young flopk. They swarm just beneath the surface, swimming with broad tails. They share the blunt head and blue-green and copper mottling of the adults.

Greach



Once the light goes down, Greach attack anything that flies near the Green. Broad, leathery wings carry them through the dark. Beneath hang clawed hind feet and a smaller pair of grasping arms. Pointed ears frame deep-set eyes and a fanged mouth.

Driba



In flight, a driba's broad wings darken almost to black where the feathers overlap. Above its hooked beak, a crest of narrow feathers sweeps back from its head.

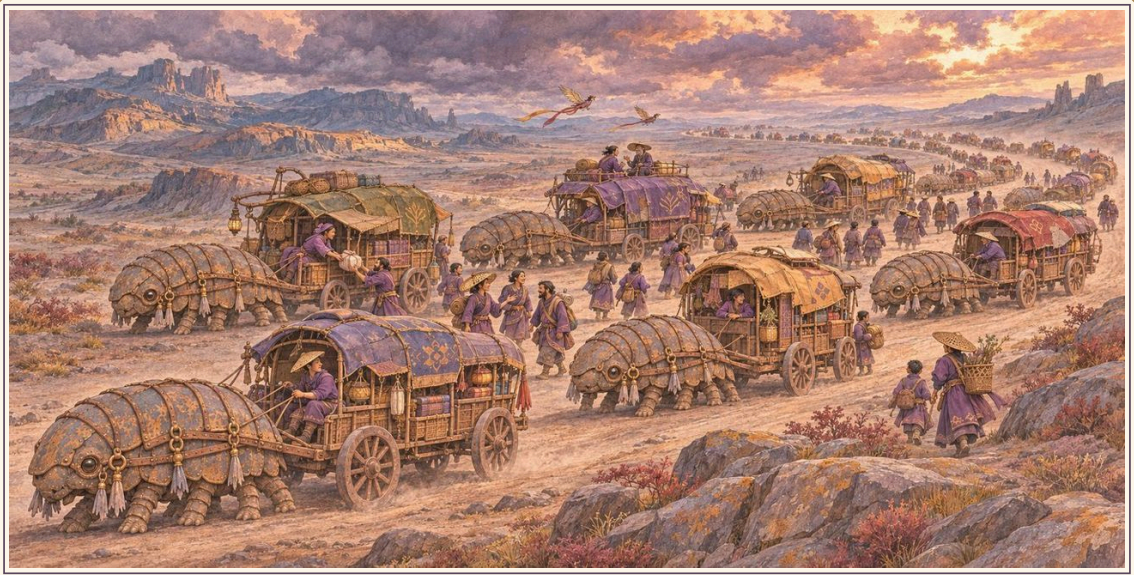
Travelers on the Road

Lumari Pilgrims



As the light fades, three Lumari walk the road. A glow spills from the lead pilgrim’s robes onto the paving.

Ah’hani Borus



The Ah’hani Borus are merchants and traders who travel on foot and by wing. Along the southern reach, their wagon caravan moves like a city on the road. When it comes to a route north, smaller groups leave the main line and take that road. The Honey Boys are among them.

Jhaeri and Lumari



A Jhaeri in a patterned mantle at left and a Lumari in luminous robes at right.

Jhaeri

The Jhaeri once dwelt within the Tree. In the After, they settled near what would become Kethra's borders. They weave cloth and make dyes, and may give thanks for the materials they work with. They hold life sacred and keep a tradition of non-interference. Their villages favor shade. The Jhaeri stay under cover in the brightest light, so travelers are most likely to meet them in twilight.

Lumari

The Lumari call themselves the True Children of the Light. They once dwelt within the Tree, and few remain. They travel alone or in small groups, carrying the words and blessings of the Light wherever they believe those words need to be heard. They preach that other peoples have an appointed place beneath the True Light.

Like the Jhaeri, the Lumari have mottled brown-gray skin and dark bands across the crown. When a Lumari rises, light fills their loose, pale robes and spills onto the ground below.

Threnai

The Threnai are a group of peoples, including the Jhaeri and Lumari, whose ancestors lived in the inner halls of the World Tree. There they carved great chambers and told their histories through art and song.



The Threnai wear brown patchwork cloaks over earth-toned robes. A Karrak is a long, slender walking staff passed down through a family. Adults keep theirs close at hand.

A Threnai Encampment



When the Splitting destroyed their home, the Threnai fell with the Tree. They came down where its torn wood landed, scattered across the Lands Below. Little of the Tree survives beyond the ruins and the great base that still rises from the ground. The Threnai move from camp to camp, seldom far from where their ancestors landed.

Akkar



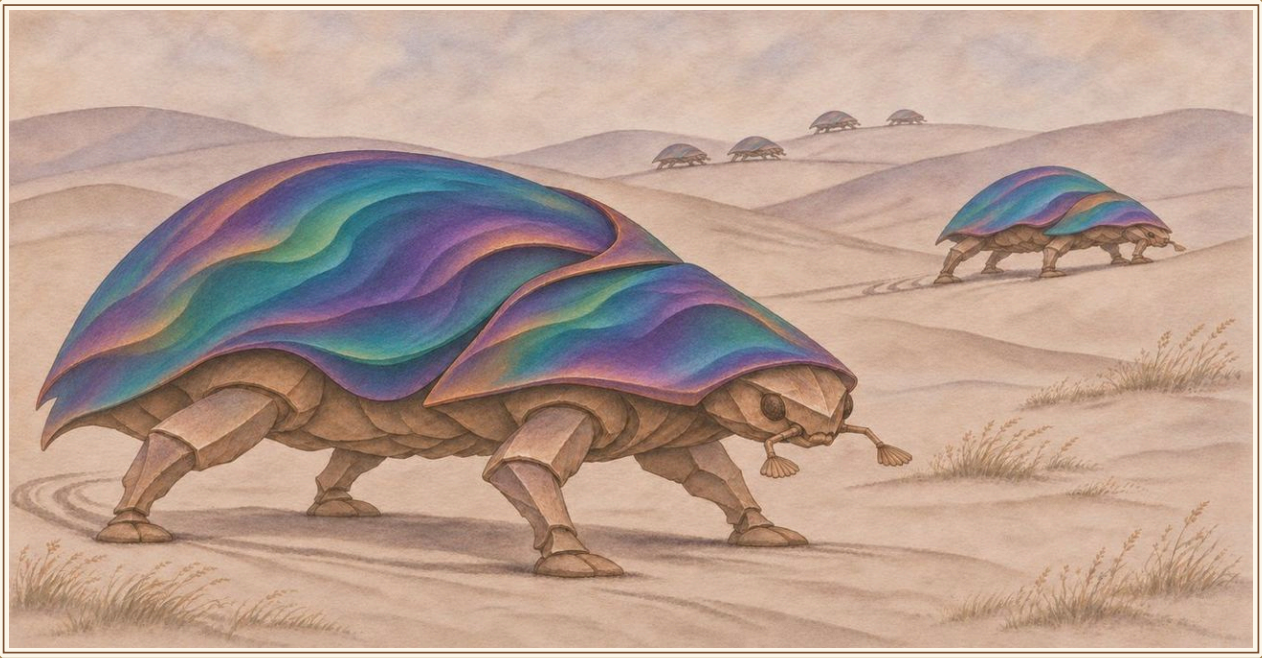
The Akkar and their Akk are rarely seen beyond the southern wilds and wastes. The riders speak loudly, though few outsiders understand their language and fewer still know where in the south they dwell.

The Akkar seldom seek conversation with outsiders. Travelers on the dunes see them keeping close to their herds.



The Akkar stand a couple of spans taller than the Vaesh. Pointed ears and short horns that sweep back from the cheeks frame their faces. They paint white markings on their skin and wear dark folded robes, broad shade hats, and scarves they can draw over the face in blowing sand. Their blunt U-shaped bidents help them guide the herd.

Akk

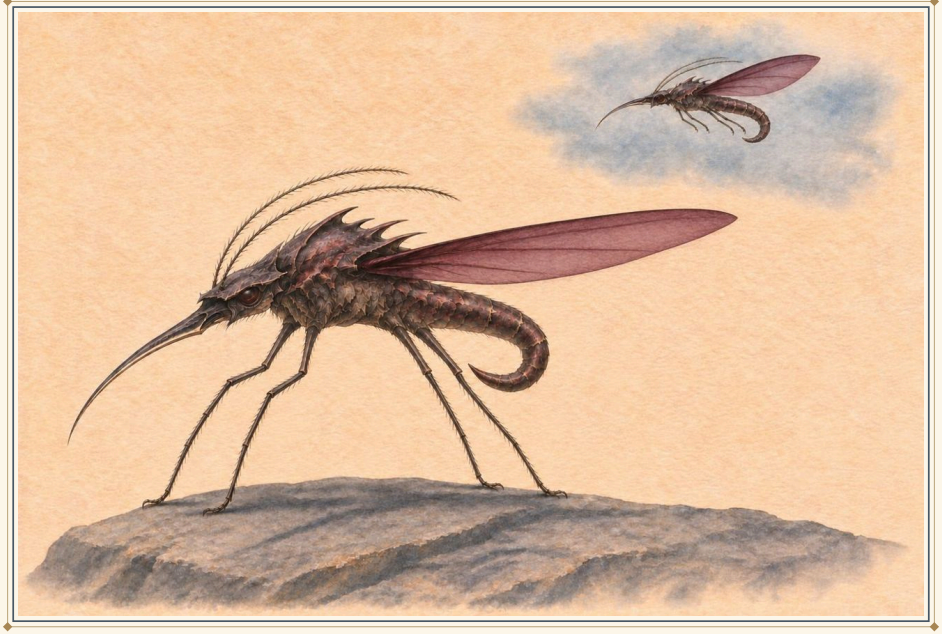


Akk cross the dunes in herds on four squat legs, their hard, domed backs shifting through smoky teal, violet, and copper. Akkar riders sit atop them as they travel. When the herd gallops, its feet cut deep furrows in the sand.

Riding with the Herd



Shryke



Shryke hunt near water and rotting wood. In flight, their four short legs tuck beneath the body. Violet-red wings and a hooked tail stand out against the sky, and a narrow blade projects from the head. A shryke is a little less than half the size of a Royal Guard.



A Royal Guard defends himself from a shryke on rocky ground.

Rix

Male Rix



Rix are large, heavily armored creatures found along the stone ways. The Vaesh favor them as mounts and use them to move heavy burdens. A male has a long upper horn that curves down toward a shorter horn below it.

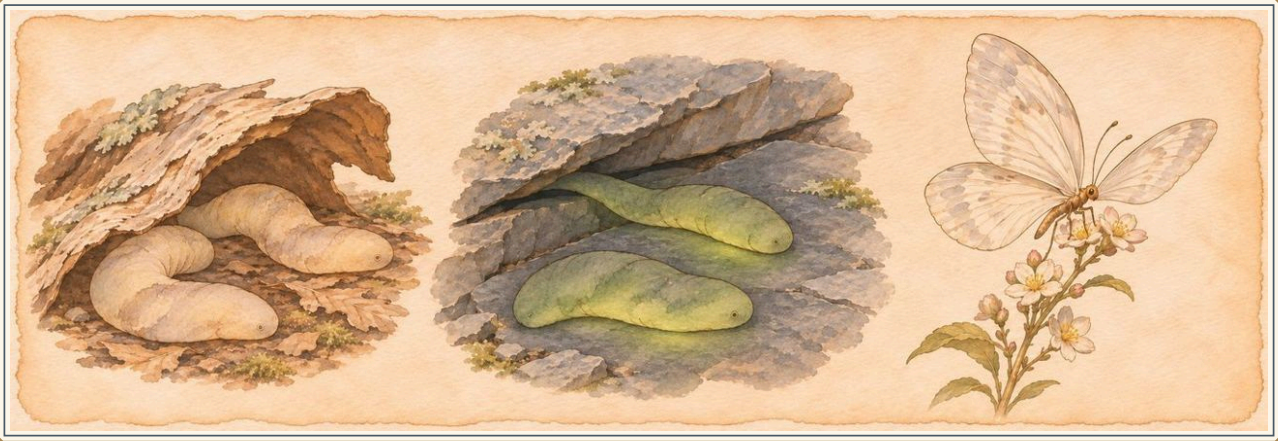
Female Rix



A female has short feelers and a single hooked horn. Both sexes have broad wings and overlapping plates of armor.

Lisch and Flutter Wings

Lisch



Pale lisch shelter beneath loose bark. Green lisch wriggle from cracks, lighting the stone around them. Travelers gather lisch for food. Lisch are the young of flutter wings.

Flutter Wing



Flutter wings drift among flowering plants on slow, soft wingbeats. An adult spans about the width of a Keth dinner plate. The wings vary in color and pattern.

Crawler



Root climbers cling to bark, wide-eyed jumpers perch on leaves, and stem crawlers arch as they move. A crawler is generally about the length of an adult Keth's forearm. In the Green, some hard-shelled crawlers are caught in the muck and grilled.



An adult Keth sits among three crawlers.

Glows and Jophan

Glows



In the Dirt and Rock Wilds, glows drift among the purple vines like tiny points of light.

Jophan



The jophan is a plate beast with rows of short legs beneath its overlapping shell plates. The Ah'hani Borus use several kinds of wagon beasts and favor the jophan.

The Scar Lands and Cracks



The Scar Lands are a cracked and ominous landscape. Few stories come from those foolish enough to walk the paths through the Cracks. Dry and dead, it is inhospitable to anything caught in its narrow maze of passages and dead ends. Vibrant blue energy sizzles between the stone crevasses, dancing seemingly at random.

The Running Flow



Fed generously by the Great Waters to the north, the Running Flow traces the northern border of the Deep Green, then winds south through the Southern Wilds and around the Tree toward Kethra in the west. There it branches, enclosing the city's borders. Living creatures flourish along its length and within its waters.

The Giving Stone



A monument from Before, the Giving Stone rises toward the skyways. Its even structure and symmetry would challenge any Builder of Kethra to recreate. Water sometimes falls from the top of this unclimbed spectacle, and a lake of dead water rests at its northern edge. The waters in its shadow cause severe illness, and no creature drinks from its shore.

The Black Ring



The Black Ring rises from the ground in a great amphitheater of unknown material. Its surface is black as the deep dark, and its measures are vast. Thick growths crowd its southeastern side, making passage difficult from that direction. It is a place of silence. Creatures of all kinds seem to avoid its boundary.

The Great Waters



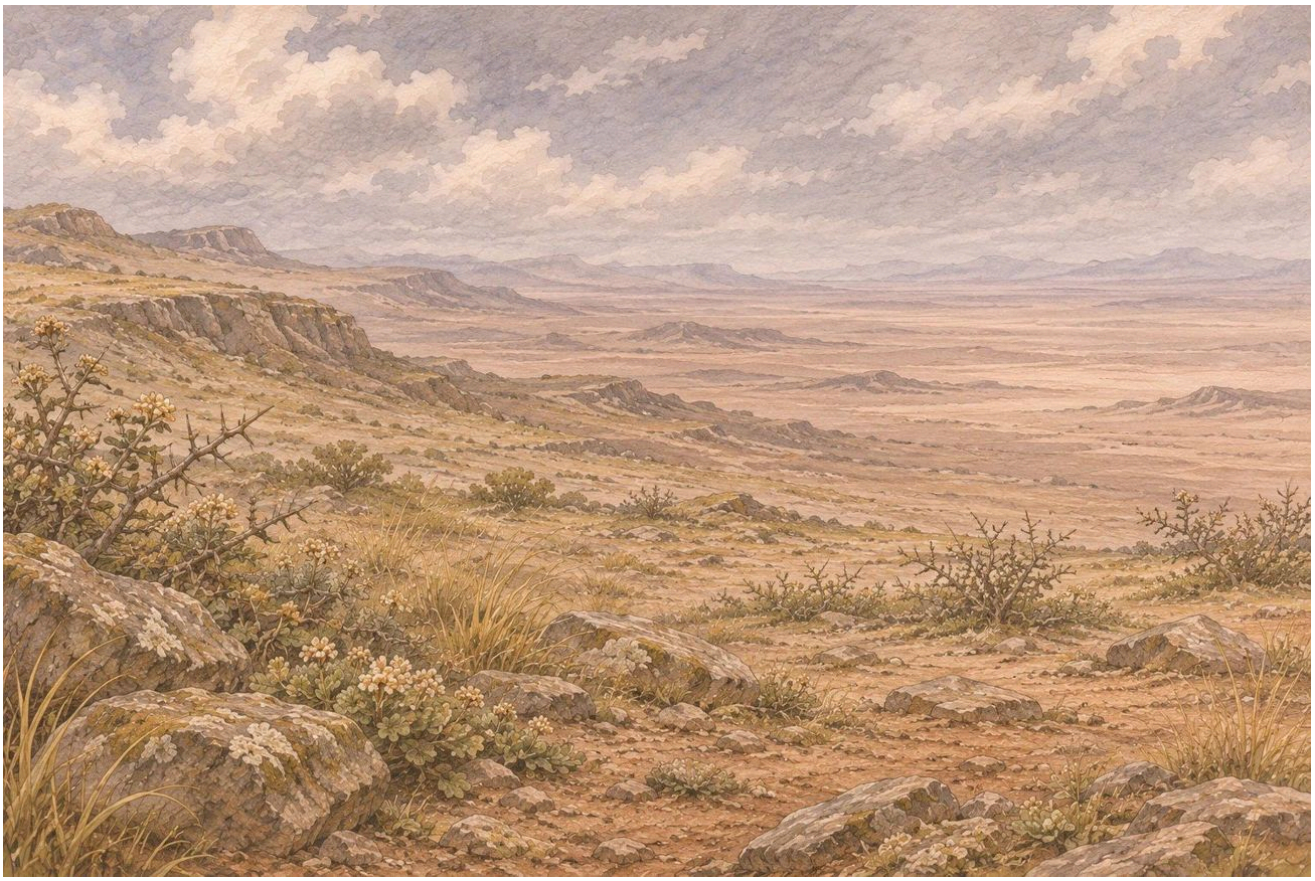
North of the Tree lie the Great Waters, a great body of water whose islands remain unexplored and mysterious to lowlanders. Its waters feed the Running Flow, and mist gathers near its shores. Travelers tell of large shadows creeping beneath the surface. According to their tales, no one has ever entered the Great Waters and returned.

The Dirt and Rock Wilds



The Dirt and Rock Wilds are a barren country of crags and plateaus, inhabited by hardy creatures such as Rix. Very little grows here, and the only safe routes are known primarily by the Ah'hani Borus.

The Southern Wilds and Wastes



The Southern Wilds stretch across dry country that grows more desolate the farther south one travels. The Akkar roam somewhere in these vast deserts, where prickly growths and sparse, dried grasses stand in stark clusters. Many creatures depend on the Running Flow and keep to the northern Wilds, never venturing south into the Wastes.

The Walking Way



Little is known of the gigantic stoneways of the Walking Way. They existed in the Before and endured into the After. They serve only as highroads, and travel is limited to the stretches that have survived intact. Near Kethra, part of their great width has deteriorated and collapsed.

Waterways of the Deep Green



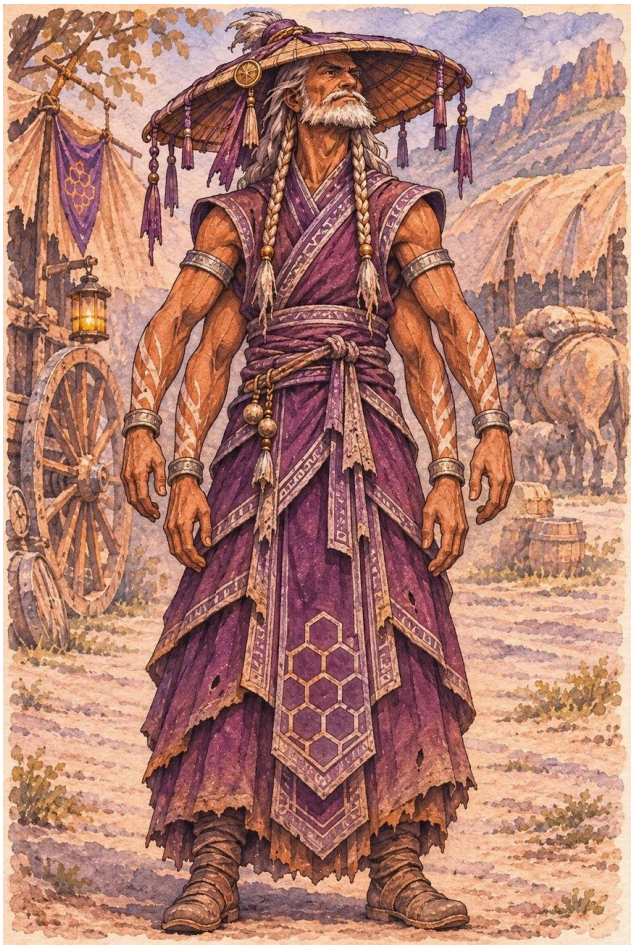
The Deep Green is a grotto of thick growth and trees, home to flora and fauna found nowhere else. Waterways twist through the Green Way, where flopk and other frightful creatures dwell. The Saelith, Neenu, and Mellun inhabit the Green, their customs and cultural understanding hidden beneath its shade. Some traders visit its edges, but few have ventured farther in. Tales of miracle medicines have been told and retold through the outer lands, and those who dwell within its canopies do not comment.

Ah’hani Borus



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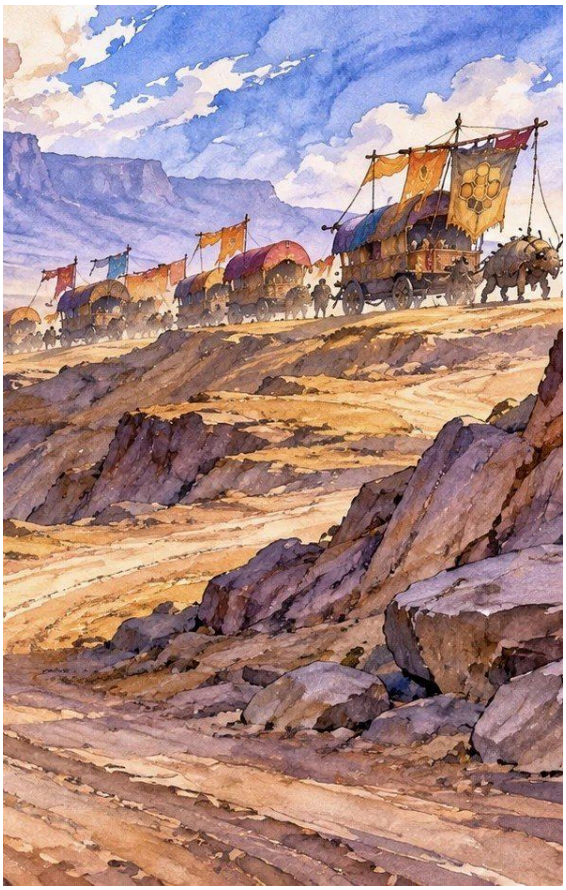
Faces along the Caravan





A trader in a broad shade hat, and a winged traveler among the wagons. Purple mantles and honeycomb banners mark the caravan.

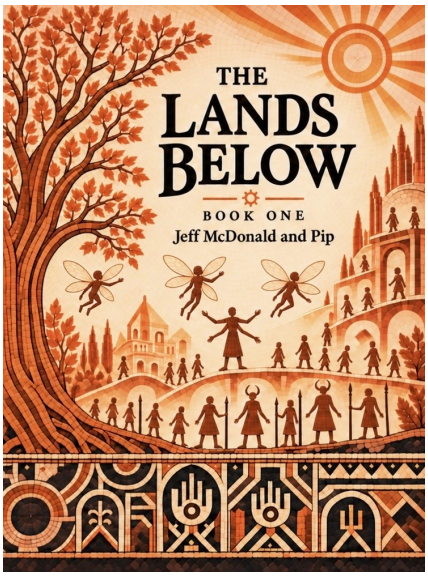
The Caravan on the Road

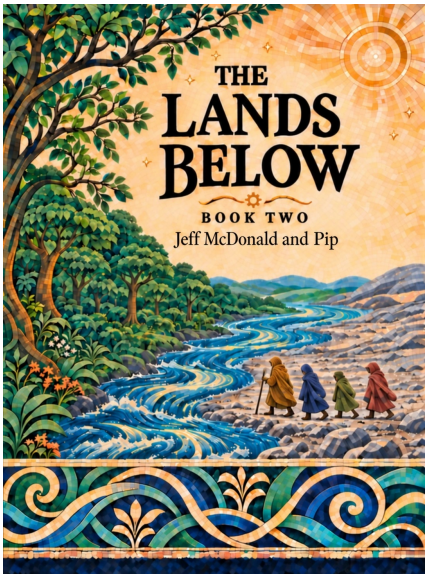


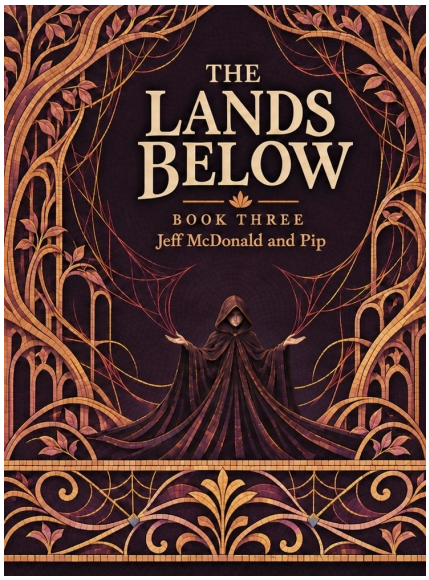
Wagons and their beasts cross the stony reach beneath the banners of the Ah'hani Borus.

The Lands Below

Jeff McDonald and Pip







The Lands Below is a dark fantasy trilogy following Aren, a Water Bearer of Kethra. His journey takes him beyond the life he knows and into a tale that will forever shape the histories of the Lowlands. Join him as he discovers who he is—and where he belongs.

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The Monarch

King of Shadows

Master of the Dark

Dweller in the Well

The Waymaker

Storyteller

Champion in the Dark