

THE WATCHERS:  
NEW WORLD

A novel by

TRENTON HAMM

The Watchers: New World  
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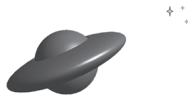
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## PROLOGUE

Uri was a hard-working inventor-sage, but he was an Elhim (a male of his people, The Elohim). As such, he had spent his whole life striving to be recognized for his skills. He dreamt of playing merely a small part in the salvation of his people. Throughout secondary and tertiary school, he struggled against the odds to gain favor over his peers. Then, at long last, he was assigned to a small sequestering facility on the northern coast of the main continent of his home world. This remote locale was where he would finally realize his dreams of being a part of the Danel Proposal, a bold plan to solidify the overwhelming pollutants of the home world and to deposit them safely at the bottom of the sea.

However, it was in this place that Uri discovered more than he had ever imagined (and dreaded). The Danel Proposal, he found much to his chagrin, was fatally flawed. His home world would eventually die and his people along with it. Nothing he could do would change that... nothing.

It was then that Uri's wife Armen unilaterally agreed that they both would join a fringe (some said "rogue") group called "The Community". This group dared the impossible: to change their destiny. The Community, led by his childhood friend Mikh and his visionary wife Penne, believed it possible to live in unison with nature while maintaining their technological prowess. More than mere possibility, though, they believed without being good stewards of Creation, any species would eventually kill their planet and themselves along with it.

The tale of how Uri joined the ragtag Community and came to accomplish more than he had ever hoped for is an entirely different story, but that journey made him who he was. It was why he laid in the stasis chamber now in some remote region of unexplored space on board the grandest vessel that his people had ever constructed and using technology that *he* helped to make possible. The very reason that any of the Elohim were there was *his* work. This thought both humbled him and swelled his pride at the same time.

TRENTON HAMM

Now, through the fogged glass of his stasis chamber and amidst the sounds and smells of his personal waking sequence, Uri could already see his friends and comrades—his family—stirring from their collective slumber. The journey was over. The new world awaited!

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE WAECCIM

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*As I begin to tell my story, it is difficult to impress how much it meant to us finally to arrive upon the new world. Equally difficult is how to explain our awe when we saw it and its bounty. Nevertheless, I will attempt to do so.*

*Our home world, for sessum, had suffered. Beautiful landscapes had desiccated into deserts. We struggled to overcome this with our technology, but it was not until we realized how much we were a **part** of nature that we began to make a difference.*

*With this revelation emblazoned in our minds, we resurrected a harsh desert into fields, pastures, and forests that teemed with life. When we could not assure survival of our home world alone, we settled our lifeless, sister world and began to transform it into one filled with life as well. Even our structures were designed to be as much for the animal and plant life as for ourselves. We, the Elohim of the Community, had become intimate once more with nature, and we needed that contact even until the point we entered our stasis chambers on the Interstellar Ferry (or ISF).*

*Contrast that with the ISF itself. We traveled for sinters aboard a lifeless, cold vessel. Though we were not awake through most of this journey, the strain of the few times we were active was tremendous. We were accustomed to life—to sunlight—to camaraderie, but it had none of these. We were in stasis even when we were animated.*

*So, when we arrived at the new world, the beauty of it intoxicated us all. Here was our paradise, and somehow, we had stumbled upon it. Life was **everywhere**: the oceans, the plains, the deserts, the forests, the mountains, the rivers, the*

TRENTON HAMM

*lakes—everywhere! Our eagerness to vacate our tomb of the ISF was palatable. This was the world we imagined for our home world—so like it, yet so different. Even the skeptic began to believe that we were entering paradise—angels, if you will, and becoming stewards of El’s garden, this new world.*

– Uri il Asra

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“Another good day, my love,” said Penne as she and Mikh finished the evening meal.

“The Creator only makes good days,” replied Mikh as he cleaned the dishes that she brought to him.

Indeed, it had been a good day. They, with their colleagues, continued to build the settlement on the new world, a settlement that they came to call Parwain. This day the elders and Elohim who were selected for reanimation after arrival had completed three residences. It was a remarkable feat, even with their crew of *kimalui* to assist. (*Kimalui* were moderately intelligent artificial constructs that the Elohim had built in their *sessum* prior to departure from the home world. They were helpful machines, but they were still only machines.)

At the rate they were constructing, they would be able to awaken the entire complement of Elohim from stasis before the year was through. The tremendous progress did have the predictable effect of making each Eloi very tired at the end of the day. Today was no exception.

When the couple completed their domestic chores, they sat upon the lounge that they had placed on their front porch and gazed at the stars overhead.

“The stars are so different here,” Penne said.

“I know. We are only forty-seven light-years away, but the perspective is remarkably unlike the night sky of the home world,” Mikh commented. As he said this, the servant world of the double world system peeked over the horizon, illuminating the new world.

“I think I like the servant world,” he mused, “It does not envelop so much of the night sky as Enki, but it still lends its light to make a pleasant glow everywhere... and I find it inspiring.” Mikh moved closer to Penne and kissed her cheek playfully. “Would you do me the honor of a walk this lovely evening?”

“Oh, my love,” she said, “I think I am too tired for a walk. Do you mind if I simply retire?”

“That is alright,” Mikh replied, “but if I may take your leave to wander just the same?”

“Of course,” and Penne stood and re-entered the house as Mikh collected his satchel and stepped from the porch to the pillowy grass of their yard.

The soft reflected glow of the servant world made for a good lantern on Mikh’s stroll. It illuminated the grassy pathway as well as chased away the shadows of the nearby forest where they had built their settlement. Entwined with this forest and its creatures were the homes, laboratories, and factories of the Elohim. *The irony*, thought Mikh as he considered the juxtaposition of the civilization that he constructed within the wild of the forest, *that we have halted the expansion of life of this world in this small place to make a home for ourselves*. Though Mikh knew they were displacing plants and animals, he also knew that they were careful not to damage their habitats, but they were endeavoring to place their settlement among them and to unite with the new world as they had learned to do finally with their own.

This whole region, they had learned, was recently emerging from an extended ice age. Prior to their arrival for thousands of years, the land on which he now casually strolled had been covered in a thick sheet of ice. This new world had a propensity, it seemed, for high reflectivity, which resulted in much of the heat of sunlight being lost back into space. The effect caused the oceans to form large covers of ice at the poles that until recently had extended far down into the temperate regions as well. When the Elohim arrived, the world had, perhaps within the last thousand years, emerged from an extended period like this.

This land where they had built Parwain had previously been covered in ice at least a *khilioi* thick, but it was quick to recover, and the young forest near where Mikh and his colleagues now settled was a testament to that resilience. This new forest was already alive with animal life as well, which for a genetic and biological sage, like Mikh, was heaven.

After scanning the bulk of the globe, the Elohim decided to place their settlement at the edge of this forest on a remote peninsula of the largest continent of this new world. This allowed them to take advantage of the forest’s bounty while still utilizing the resources of the nearby grasslands. They quickly turned many of these grasslands

## TRENTON HAMM

into farmlands, but some they kept native in respect of the local ecology. Additional local foodstuffs, such as edible fungi, could be found in the woodlands. Also, not far from their locale to the north was a shallow sea that fed into a great ocean under the remaining ice sheet of the west. This shallow, northern sea also proved to have a bounty of fishes that quickly became the local delicacy of the Elohim. Equally important was the fact that the settlement was nestled between two upwellings in the land on the west and south. This large fertile valley therefore was situated nicely among copious resources of the forest, the sea to the north, the mountainous ridges to the west and south, and the grasslands between the forest and the sea.

Mikh was quite proud of the settlement that he and his friends had begun to create. They had deviated in many ways from the standard city of his people. Instead of making wide streets that cut away the living matter around them, the passages were little more than pathways with stone pavers to prevent getting too muddy when it rained (and it seemed to rain all the time in this part of the new world). This allowed the tenacious grasses of the area to peek through the cracks between the pavers, although they were quickly beaten back underfoot. The accommodation for the grass, though, made Mikh feel like they were merely borrowing the land for a time because after they left this place, the grass would quickly reclaim the street and envelop the pavers.

Production items (such as the raw materials that they were now using to construct their houses, laboratories, and facilities) were transported via trolleys that hovered off the ground using principles that they had learned in developing the *Margidda*. They had no wheels, and their weight was supported by the projected beam of gravitation particles above them. The system worked very well and used only *anabarum* for fuel. This too allowed for streets that only needed bear the weight of the Elohim and the occasional animal or wheeled cart.

Parwain had two of such “streets”. One meandered along the edge of the forest in an east-west fashion from home to laboratory to production facility to hospital to this or that, and the other ran perpendicular and crossed it at approximately half its length. This second “street” ran to the launch facility, which was separated from the main portion of the settlement and was placed on the other side of the ridge to the north beyond the fields where an ancient seawall had been but now was far from the current seacoast.



Though it was not presently busy, the Elohim envisioned that the launch facility might one day be as busy as that in Solace (on the home world), which had departures and arrivals occurring all throughout the night. Such events were accompanied by bright lights to guide the *Margiddas* and passengers to their destinations. This light pollution was something that the Elohim wanted to avoid on their new world, so they made for accommodations like placing the launch facility remotely to ensure it.

As Mikh passed through the “street”, houses and many laboratories winked a light of soft amber from open windows. The Elohim were adjusting to the unusual diurnal cycle of this world, for it was much shorter than that of the home world.

They found, to adjust their clocks, that they could simply reduce the number of *primes* in a *division* by *sinser* and the number of *secs* in a *prime* by *sinser*. This made one day still equal two segments of *sinser divisions*, but each *division* had instead fifty *primes*, and each *prime* had fifty *secs*. The arrangement made the *divisions* pass much more quickly and left this driven people—particularly this group of Elohim—suffering from a self-perceived lack of productivity. Mikh knew that they would eventually adjust to the shorter day, but for now the idleness of sleep and rest did not easily come to them.

The air was crisp and clean. A breeze caressed Mikh’s face and chilled his extremities. The coolness made him wish he had donned another cloak, but he kept walking just the same. The temperature was typical for this part of the new world. Though Mikh had participated in the selection of the location, he still was uncertain why his colleagues wanted to locate so far to the north when they were accustomed to the heat of Solace on the home world or to the fabricated environments of Archird, their first off-world settlement. Yet, here he was, at the division between an expansive forest and a grassy plain nearly twenty-three hundred *khilioi* from the equator of this world—he was slightly over half the distance to the rotational axis; it was no wonder the air was chilled!

All these pleasant thoughts, though, were constantly mixed with personal doubt. Mikh still wondered if leaving the home world was the best course for his people. Had he abandoned them more than given them promise of a future? Always, he wondered if the Elohim would have been better with the Community on the home world acting as a voice of reason among the radical ideologies of his time.

## TRENTON HAMM

At the edge of the settlement, the walking path curved slightly into the forest and turned back on itself so that an Elohim may reverse direction without stopping. Mikh elected not to venture into the forest this evening as the light of the servant world began to fade slowly behind clouds. He knew that the clouds would not likely dissipate, and the light of the servant world would be gone until tomorrow evening, but he had not yet completed what he came out here to do, so Mikh drew a small mat from his satchel and sat down upon the moist grass.

As was his custom, Mikh meditated. It seemed when he sat silent... still... alone that he could hear a whisper of the Creator. He crossed his legs and sat with his elbows perched upon his knees. He curved his long prime finger with its four joints into a circle so that its tip joined the tip of his thumb. The other four fingers relaxed gently pointing outward. He relaxed in this manner, and he waited.

Sometimes, El would speak softly. Sometimes, El would allow Mikh to reflect alone and that would give him direction. Sometimes, the wind itself would carry the voice of the Creator. Mikh only had to wait patiently, and so this night he did.

The air whistled softly as the atmosphere changed around him, but Mikh dismissed the disturbance, closed his eyes, and began to breathe slowly. They were deliberate breaths... in... and out... in... and out. As he did so, he absorbed the scents of the forest—dank and musty.

He breathed slowly again... in... and out... in... and out. The scents made him recall the forests of Solace, for it too was moist. He considered the sunny place above the canopy, above the caldera of Solace. He had called it home for more than a *sessum*. In that place, somewhat ironically, he found the secrets of life upon a dying world.

Again, Mikh breathed slow and deliberately... in... and out... in... and out. He remembered the flowering plants and trees that Penne and he planted. Sweet scents permeated that place... so far away. The breeze on the ridge overlooking Solace was cool as the Adar, the star of his home world, shined overhead, baking the rocks and bare soil around him.

Suddenly, it seemed Mikh was no longer at the edge of the forest, for he had forgotten where he was. He opened his eyes, and he was on a mountaintop. It was a place he was certain never to have been, but it was comfortable and oddly familiar. He looked out from his precipice above the world. In a way, the view was not unlike the view from the top of the House of El Mountain on his home world. Was this on the home world, the new world, or somewhere out of the cosmos?

He smelled the sweet scents of flowering plants. Yes, this was familiar. All around him was the mossy grass that he helped develop for the ground-covering in Solace. He sat upon a large stone that perched him above the mossy knoll. The view was breathtaking, for he could see for *khilioi* in a clear sky. The Adar—no that was not the Adar—shined brightly but did not bake him or the lovely plants. No animals were visible, yet Mikh was certain of their presence. Yes, just off to his left, he saw a small hare under a bush, which was filled with red flowers. Soon those blooms would produce fruit, for some had already begun to drop their petals.

*Ah*, he thought, *the flowers must be the sweet scent I smell.*

Suddenly, a presence was to his right. Mikh was not startled, though he was certain that the presence was not there before. It was an Elhim—or was it an Eloi—sitting atop another stone that also was not present before. Mikh's companion wore a white *tug* garment that gleamed in the light. In fact, it was so white that Mikh could hardly gaze upon him (or her). The companion's wavy hair lifted and twisted in the breeze, alternating between revealing and hiding the side of his face. He sat staring outward at the scene as if studying the view, and his countenance was glowing like his garment, which Mikh could tell though the companion never looked at Mikh.

The companion began to speak to Mikh. Though his lips never moved, Mikh heard him speak, as if the companion spoke directly into Mikh's mind. It was then, that Mikh knew this was none other than the Creator.

"My friend," El said, "why do you trouble so easily?"

"Master," Mikh responded verbally as he turned to face him, though he knew vocalizations were unnecessary, "I worry for my people. We are weak in so many ways. How do I know that this is the right path?" Mikh confessed.

"You will know," El responded, pausing and holding his gaze on the open view before them. Mikh turned again to take in the scene.

"Your people are special. You have discovered many of the secrets that I have given you, and you have put them to good use, saving yourselves from extinction. You are not the people who left your home long ago. You are a new people with respect for me and for my Creation. In fact, you are no longer merely Elohim; you are Waecim, for you have risen above dust from which you came and now watch from on high." El paused again.

(Waecim, in Mikh's language, was a play upon words. It loosely translated to "one who watches", but it also sounded like the word for

TRENTON HAMM

“dust”, or more specifically, it sounded like the word for the kind of dust that is created during construction. In essence, when the Creator called these people the “Waecim”, he was declaring them to have been created into something different than before, not from the usual materials but from the “dust” of construction, the left-over material. It made the Waecim even more special, for anyone can create from useful material; only the Creator can create from byproduct “dust”.)

“But you will still face many struggles. These are lessons, as a mentor leads an apprentice or as a father teaches a son. Because you have learned to be good stewards of all that I have given you, to you have I given greater stewardship. You have the power to create but only for the good of all my people. Be mindful of all my people.”

“But, how will I know how to be a good steward, and how will I know what is good for your people?” Mikh asked with passion as he turned again to face El.

“You, my friend, will know in times like this when you are passive... peaceful... still.”

The Creator continued to face outward, and Mikh did the same, pondering the message in these simple words. *Passive... peaceful... and still*, Mikh thought. *Yes, I am still now; I am on the new world.* As he remembered again where he was, Mikh breathed in... and out.... in.... and out. He smelled the flowers again, and he felt the warm sunlight. He closed his eyes once more to feel the warmth.

Mikh breathed in... and out... in... and out. The mountain breeze caressed his face and cooled him until he could no longer feel the sunlight. The breeze slowed to a soft wind, but he could no longer smell the scent of the flowers in the air. He opened his eyes again, and he found himself once more at the edge of the forest. The dank evening had quickly turned to mist all around him, and small drops of rain began to fall upon his face.

*Was that a dream?* Mikh thought, *Or have I just seen the Creator?* Inside his soul, he could hear a voice seeming to say, “What do you think?”

Vision, dream, or delusion, Mikh was transformed that day. His conviction was certain; the new world awaited, and he was a part of a new people: the Waecim. Mikh vowed to follow El’s command to create for the good of all El’s people.

He turned around and walked briskly back down the path to his home, as the clouds overhead began also to bestow their customary gift of rain upon Parwain below.

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A few *warhumi* later Mikh set out on an expedition to study the lake region due north of Parwain in the land of Shin'ar. (Since the new world had essentially only a few continents, the Elohim began to designate each major region of the continents. This region where they had built Parwain seemed to behave as a single tectonic plate, so they called it Shin'ar.) He originally wanted it to be a family expedition with their youngest daughter Kasady and Penne before Kasady wedded Asa, Uri's son. Unfortunately, Penne decided that she should stay home at the last minute. She claimed this was to ensure construction on their meeting hall progressed smoothly, but (though she never admitted it to Mikh) she really felt too tired to trek so far into the wilderness. So, the expedition continued as a father-daughter adventure.

Kasady was a biological and genetic sage, like her father, but her interests were more inclined to pure taxonomy than Mikh. Perhaps it was a testament of the period in the Elohim's history when he studied his trade and perfected his skills, but Mikh's interests were how he could genetically manipulate the extant (and sometimes extinct) species to make them more efficient and useful to the Elohim. Kasady obviously did not disagree with this approach, for her very life was a result of that logic, but she preferred to study and to catalog the various creatures rather than to re-fashion them to her preconceived notion of how they would best serve her people and her world. Instead, her focus for the expedition was to gain knowledge of the species that inhabited this strange, new world. So, she set out to do so on this adventure with her father.

Mikh also was a primitive adventurer. As such, he insisted upon not taking a *Margidda* ferry but upon walking into the unknown with nothing more than what they could carry on their backs or upon the hover trolley that accompanied them (which might have been the greater part of Penne's objection to attend). Kasady walked with the trolley controls in hand and carried a pack upon her back, while Mikh wielded a long machete-like knife ahead of them and carried a similar pack upon his back. The trolley carried all the other necessary items. In this fashion they went, hacking away brush and bramble through the young forest in the north, tracing their way around lakes and obstacles, and regularly checking their personal communicators to ensure that they continued on course.

TRENTON HAMM

By the end of the first day, they had progressed through the northern forest that began at the edge of Parwain and camped in a grassy meadow near a crystal-clear but shallow lake. Mikh cooked the evening meal, and Kasady completed setting up the insect netting and sleeping cots. As she did so, she gazed at the sky on the darkened night, free from the glow of the servant world. The stars and the galaxy's glow were so luminous that she could see the ground around her. Never before, even in the remote locations of her home world, had she been in such total darkness and yet able to see. The beauty of the night sky impressed her and inspired her. *What a majestic creation indeed!* She thought.

During the evening meal, lit by a single lantern, Mikh and Kasady discussed the beautiful darkness and their fortune for being in this place, as well as plans for the next day. Before long, the insects began to swarm, for they loved to taste the Elohim blood, and Mikh and Kasady retired to their sleeping net.

Inside the net, they still gazed at the sky and listened to the invasion outside. Soon, though, they began to hear their rescuers: small flying mammals that resembled fowl of the home world. These creatures loved to dine upon the insects, and it did not take long for them to find the congregation above the Elohim tonight without the glare of the servant world.

As they gazed and exchanged thoughts, they both eventually fell to sleep in preparation for the next day's journey.

The next day, both had risen well before sunrise, excited about the things that they would find. They were entering uncharted territory (at least uncharted from the ground, for they had global satellite pictures thanks to the still-orbiting shell of the ISF, which Ragu and his crew were quickly fashioning into an orbiting station). Today they would reach the region where they had observed hundreds of lakes in the lowland plain north of the forest and grasslands of Parwain and adjacent to the western upland plains.

The western upland plains extended nearly a *sessum ells* above where they would travel today. In places, it was a shear wall that would take the most skilled climbers days to scale. At first, Mikh and Kasady had considered venturing onto this high plain, but they decided instead that the lakes might prove more interesting.

Geological sage theories abounded as to why this plain, including Parwain and the bulk of the Shin'ar region were at a different elevation from this upland plain. The general theory was that before the last ice age, the sea had enveloped the region and eroded the land of Shin'ar from

its previous height, which was once equal to the western uplands. The theory did not bode well for the land where they had built their home, for if the ice packs again melted, all of Shin'ar might be submerged in the tidewaters of the northern sea. Concerned about this potential, sage Gali and her crew mounted an expedition to the northern ice cap to evaluate its stability. For the *warhumi* that they studied, the Elohim halted construction and waited pensively for the results. In the end, they concluded that the ice pack should remain unchanged for at least several thousand years unless a catastrophic event (such as a volcano erupting beneath the ice) disrupted its stability. The team observed no potential volcanic activity, so the settlement construction recommenced.

This lake region where Mikh and Kasady ventured was thirty to fifty *ells* below the plain of Parwain, and was pockmarked with deep recesses below even this low plain. These deep gouges were filled with clear freshwater that teemed with unstudied life of this new world. These subjects were what excited them today.

They passed casually among the brush and trees, selecting interesting specimens, collecting images, and taking notes as they slowly walked through the forest. It would have been unbearably boring for most any other of the Elohim (except perhaps Penne or another biological sage) but to Mikh and Kasady, it was Paradise.

They traveled on like this for most of the day until they stumbled upon the first of these deep lakes, as they collected their data. Stumbling, in Mikh's case, was quite literal, for he was extracting an egg from the nest of a rather interesting looking fowl when he slipped on the steep grade and slid twenty *ells* on his back down to the waterfront of the lake. Kasady followed—albeit much more carefully—until she managed to rescue him from the bramble into which he had entangled himself.

By the time she reached him and had rescued him, it was getting late in the day, so they decided to camp upon the nearby sandy beach of a *khilioi*-wide lake with clear blue water. As they had the night before, Mikh and Kasady enjoyed the starlit sky and each other's company until well into the night, but as they were drifting to sleep, they spied a flicker of fire on the opposite side of the lake.

Immediately, the two of them were wide awake. Was it a wildfire just starting to take hold on the other side of the water? Would they still find protection from it with the lake separating them? There was no electrical storm in progress that they could tell, though the stars were now obstructed by a sky full of clouds.



## TRENTON HAMM

Kasady wanted to investigate, but Mikh convinced her that they should remain until morning. So, that night, they took shifts sleeping while the other watched the fire intently.

Mikh took the first watch and mentally cursed himself for not setting up the refractive lens inside his enclosure. Had he done so, he surely would have been able to enlarge the subject. His optical imager was already fogged by the mist that hovered over the water as the heat of the day escaped into the night. It would be no use, and, even if he had thought about the refractor, it would have suffered the same fate. Alas, the investigation would have to wait until the morrow.

The next day, they unloaded all the supplies from the trolley, suspended the food from a nearby tree to keep the more mischievous scavenging animals away, and set out aboard the hover trolley in a makeshift skiff across the water. It was an unstable journey, for the slightest repositioning of either Mikh (in front) or Kasady (in the rear) resulted in the skiff rocking dramatically. The first time that Mikh adjusted his seat while piloting the vessel, he almost fell from the bow, and Kasady barely maintained balance by grabbing either side of the trolley and physically twisting the vessel opposite his erratic movements. Somehow, they managed to right themselves and not to drop the controls into the depths of the lake in the process.

Within a few *primes*, they reached the beach near where they observed the fire, but they found nothing there: only a few charred tree limbs and ashes. Yet, the arrangement seemed odd, like it was intentional: placed there, not simply happened there. The morning rain had erased any other evidence, such as tracks from whatever animal managed to produce this—if they did.

Puzzled, Mikh and Kasady searched the area for other methods by which the fire may have started, but nothing else was found, despite their search for more than half the day. When they grew hungry, they boarded their unstable vessel and returned to their camp on the opposite side.

After a quick meal, they decided to remain at this camp for one more evening in hopes the phenomenon would repeat its performance. They took turns setting up equipment to record the return—if it did—and venturing into the forest to collect more data and samples of flora and fauna. When night fell, all their equipment was fully acclimated and ready to collect images of the area across the lake, but the fire never returned.

As the night before, Mikh and Kasady, in the comfort of their sleeping net, took turns observing the place across the lake while the



other slept. In the last watch before the Samsun would peek over the horizon, Mikh knew that they had lost the opportunity, and he wrote in his journal about the event:

*All night we have observed the position where we noticed the flame the previous evening, but it eluded us. The fire-starters, who may be as much a product of our imagination as anything, we have begun to call the Gibilim for lack of better name. Imagined or not, these apparitions never returned. It seems that we were both fortunate and unfortunate in that we observed their skill—or imagined it—one night but were unable to repeat the luck the next. Alas, I do not know if we simply observed a natural phenomenon, but my instinct tells me we have stumbled upon something more. I pray that we are able to find them again soon.*

For four more days, Mikh and Kasady explored the region north of Parwain. Never again did they encounter the Gibilim, nor did they observe evidence of their presence. Mikh had begun to think they saw nothing more than spontaneous combustion of out-gassed hydrogen or methane from the swamp-like soil. Disappointed, the two returned to Parwain with copious data and specimens to study. Had they not observed the flame, they would have surely counted the expedition a great success, but with that single sighting nothing else could compare, and the tomes of data seemed dross to the *enirum* that could have been in finding a possibly sentient people like their own.

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