\*She felt the ridges of the map she was carving and wondered if the storms below still whispered secrets to those who dared listen.

Her fingers traced the ridges of the map she had etched into the worn surface, each groove a whisper from the storms that raged below. The night had been restless, the wind carrying riddles that gnawed away at her resolving her to cling onto her last ember: hope. It was a fragile hope, sharp as the air of the desolate land of A’lars, where the weak were shadows and the strong ruled with no mercy. Yet it was enough. Enough to drive her forward, past the ruins of what once was a civilisation, toward the faint chance of finding her long-lost ebullient father.

She missed the smell of his caffeine-infested breath hugging against her like a warm blanket and his smile simply taking away her breath, leaving her flabbergasted. He always seemed to weasel joy or happiness into everything he did, and that was what separated him from the world. He was taken, not lost, she reminded herself, by the unseen hand of the Black Guard, whose power thundered across the land like an endless storm, unyielding and merciless.

A lugubrious sense of melancholy was scented a few meters away, and Sarah decided to follow it blindly down to her last straw. She arrived and it wasn’t good. Her mouth was hanging open as if the frightened horns of a petrified beast, she stood still and was shaking like a tree in a fierce gale. Cold weight coiled around her, shrouding her rigid spine. Drops of perspiration trickled down her cold slippery palms. It was as though her body was backing away from the lived-through horror before her. Her father was undertaking a trial and the Black Guard himself was the judge.

Teetering on the precipice of anarchic trepidation, Sarah immediately foresaw what was going to happen. Like all trials in the land of A’ lars, the Black Guard won, and fate made sure of it. The punishment was the problem. It was death. Her father’s face was bleak and dismal, emotionless like a mask. She gasped, what had they done to him? Was she too late? What had happened to the jubilant, smiling man she had once known? Would she stop this trial, potentially risking her life and her father’s, or stay engulfed in the shadows, one with the storm’s whispers, and let her father get tormented? The choice was hers, and it needed to be made immediately.

\*In the soft glow of the alien sunset, the crowd gasped at the intricate sculpture, unaware it was created by the one thing they feared most.

The crowd gathered around in reverent silence as the intricate sculpture illuminated under the moons of Phobos and Deimos. The appealing sculpture seemed to breathe ebullience into the air of Elysium; its convex edges capturing the moonlight in a breathtaking, divine manifestation. However, as grandiose as something could be, a flaw follows not too far from it. This sculpture had an anonymous crafter, and that usually meant trouble. Big trouble.

Engulfed in the shadows of the town hall, Minka eagerly observed her breath fragile. The sculpture was hers, a blend of raw strength, pure love, and desire, meaning to resemble her absent father. She had used technology inconceivable to the mortal mind but strictly prohibited and banned in the yards of Elysium. Such an elegant tool with unbridled strength and power always had a fatal flaw. Especially since this one was constructed by the core energy of the Underground. The settlers had banned tools like them centuries ago, deeming them dangerous to remain in use, although they had never truly understood them.

To the understanding of the settlers, the Chthonic Deities were disgraces; their culture drowning in lies and absurd myths. Minka was the last descendant of her kind, and she knew the truth. Her tribe created sculptures to celebrate the harmony and peacefulness of life, not destruction. However, she knew the settlers would never look at it from that perspective.

As the mumbles grew louder and louder cloaked spindly man stepped forward and pointed at a symbol that was shimmering palely. The recognizable, unmistakable mark of the Deities. Awestruck inhalations resounded through the crowd.

“Who made this,” a stern voice broke through the silence sounding like a dictator ordering his soldiers.

Minka’s heart pounded. She had wanted them to realise the potential of her tribe’s beauty, but now that was at the cost of exposing her. Should she step forward valiantly and claim her deserved heritage or slink back into the overbearing shadows, leaving the truth lingering in the chilly air?

How has your family shaped the way you approach challenges in life? Can you give a specific example?

My family has shaped my response to challenges with a strong sense of resilience and support. Growing up, my parents always used to say to me, "However tough the challenge may get, you must persevere through it.” At first, when I was young, I never really instilled this life lesson into my everyday life, but when I grew up, I truly understood the meaning. I learned this at my first school cross-country event. I was dying, my lungs burning, my arms weak, and my legs like jelly. Then I remembered what my parents had said. I remembered thinking to myself, what was the use of trying it was only a school cross-country event. How would that affect my job or my overall life? To be honest, it wouldn’t have done anything, but it would’ve changed my mindset about the things I do every day. Instead of quitting when I felt like it, I’ll push that extra mile, fight that extra round, or be the last one standing with the winner's mindset. That’s how my family shaped the way I approach challenges.

What is one tradition or habit in your family that you cherish the most, and why?

One habit I cherish dearly in my family is Board Game Night every Friday. It’s a simple tradition, but it means a lot to me. Every week, we gather around the table, ready to face off in friendly competitions. There’s always a bit of teasing, but it’s all in good fun. Sometimes I’m winning, sometimes I’m not, but it doesn’t matter because what I enjoy most is the time spent with my family, the shared laughter, and the way we support each other, even in a game. These moments, though small, are some of my favourite and most meaningful of the week.

Who in your family inspires you the most, and what lessons have you learned from them?

The person in my family who inspires me the most is my older sister. She recently received a scholarship for her academic achievements, and I really admire her dedication and hard work. Growing up, I watched her push through challenges, never settling for less, and always striving to be her best. Even when things got tough, she never complained but just kept going and persevering. I’ve learned so much from her, especially about the importance of perseverance, setting goals, and staying disciplined. Her passion and commitment motivate me to work harder and believe in myself, no matter how difficult the journey may seem.