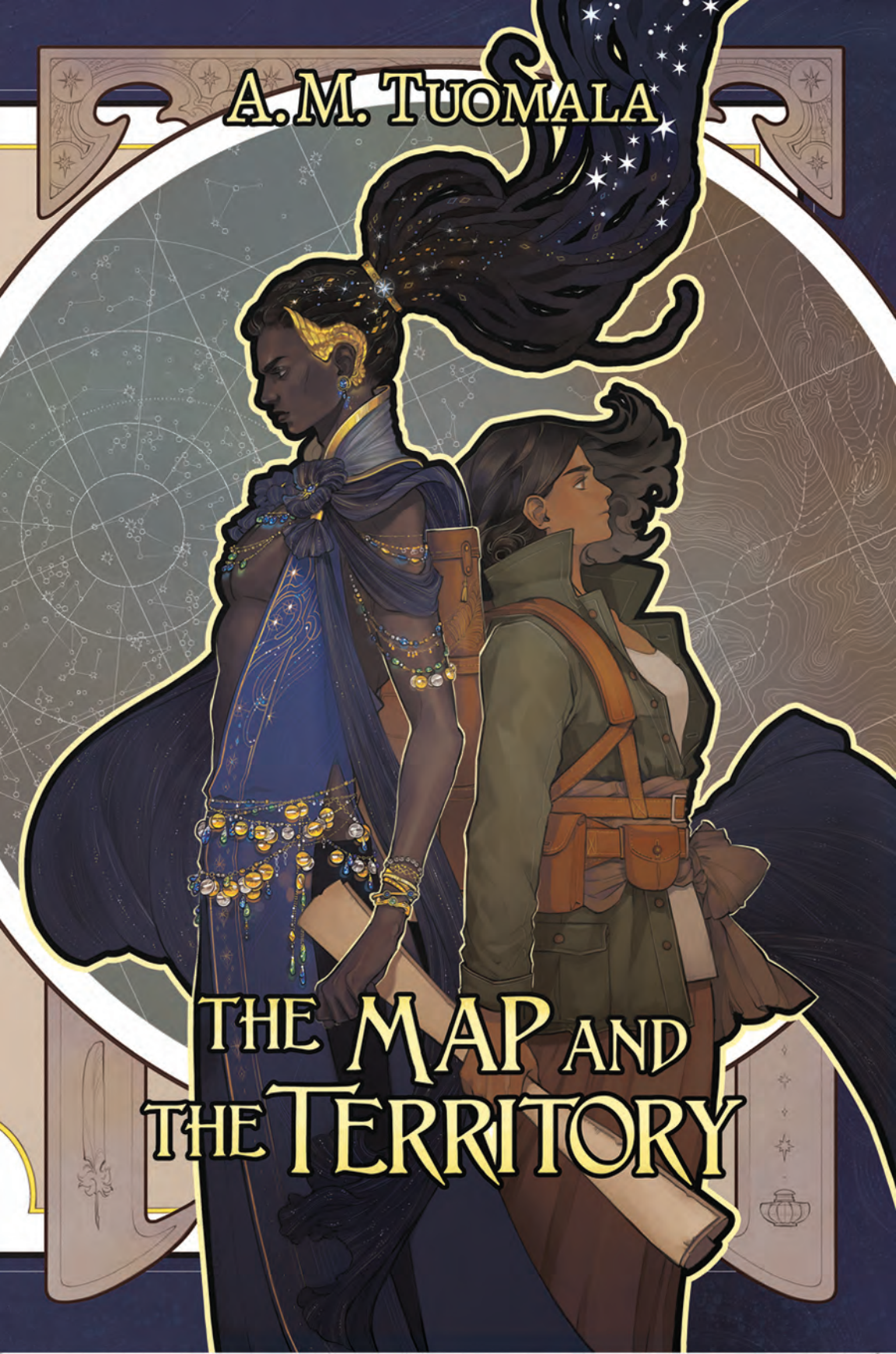


A.M. TUOMALA

THE MAP AND
THE TERRITORY



PRAISE FOR THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY

Gripping, vivid, and magical, this fantasy adventure from Tuomala (*Drakon*) has a power to enchant its readers... // Tuomala tackles issues of class and power as they relate to trade and infrastructure in a world devastated by apocalyptic events, raising the poignant question of how people can or should take care of each other after the world falls apart. This impressive fantasy packs the punch of a much longer epic.

— *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

...Magic, stories, and cartography mix with romance, adventure, and philosophy. Questions such as what we owe to each other and how do we care for one another when the world is falling apart seem particularly apt for our (nonmagical) world. A stellar start to a new fantasy series, this book is highly recommended for all fantasy collections.

— Lynnanne Pierson, *Booklist*, starred review

I loved the intricate world-building and the unique magics, but most of all I loved the characters, facing the end of their world with compassion and the determination to—somehow!—find a way forward.

— Melissa Scott, legendary pioneering SFF author
and winner of multiple genre awards

A.M. Tuomala's picaresque *Map and Territory* follows the footsteps of the best traditions of secondary world fantasy travel narratives like that of Jack Vance, C.J. Cherryh, and K V Johansen. With a pair of well-drawn, queernorm characters to guide us and be our entry point, *Map and Territory* is a riveting journey across a diverse and interesting fantasy landscape that is suffering a mysterious, multi-sided cataclysm.

— Paul Weimer, SFF book reviewer and Hugo finalist

With worldbuilding reminiscent of LeGuin, Tuomala has constructed a rich and exciting story of survival and friendship. Likeable characters and interesting twists elevate *The Map and the Territory* into an intriguing and memorable adventure.

— Jo Graham, author of the acclaimed *Numinous World* historical fantasies and *Calpurnian Wars* space operas

ALSO BY A.M. TUOMALA:

Erekos

Drakon

THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY

A.M. TUOMALA



First edition published 2022

Copyright © 2022 by A.M. Tuomala

All rights reserved.

Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright act of 1976,
no part of this book may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted
in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system,
without the prior written permission of the editor and publisher.

Please respect authors' rights: don't pirate.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either
are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons,
living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

For information, address
Athena Andreadis
Candlemark & Gleam LLC,
38 Rice Street #2, Cambridge, MA 02140
elois@candlemarkandgleam.com

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
In Progress

ISBNs: 978-1-952456-12-1 (print), 978-1-952456-13-8 (digital)

Cover art by Heeseon Won

Editor: Athena Andreadis

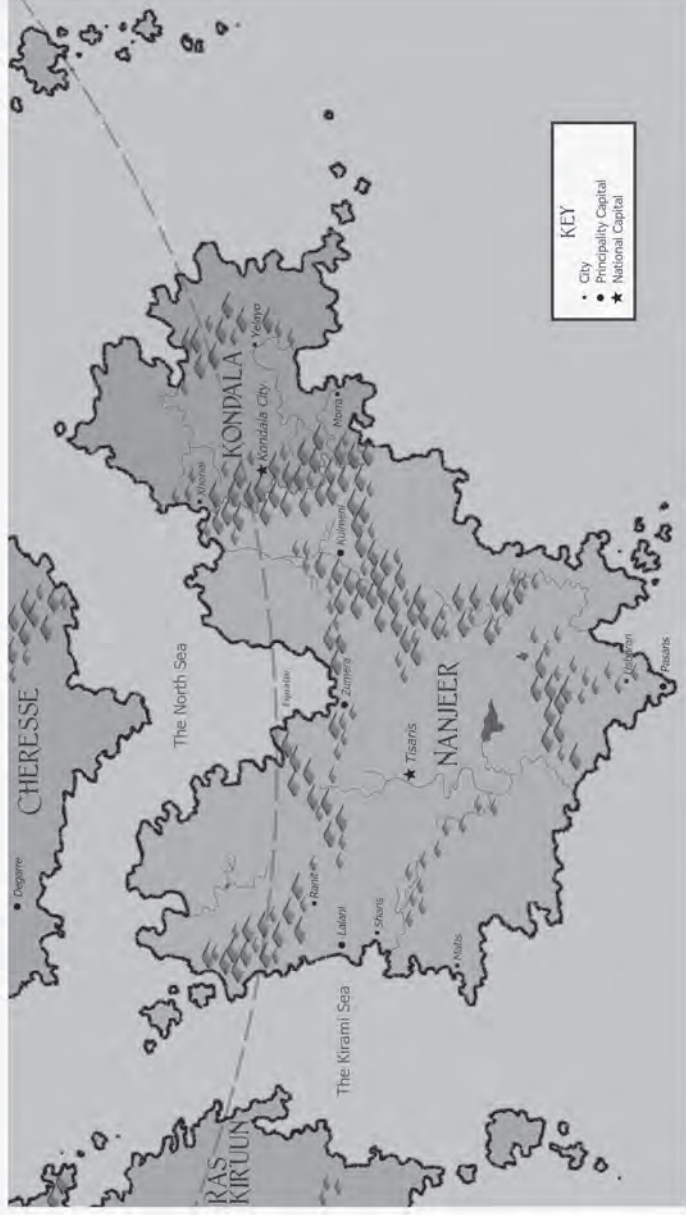
Proofreader: Patti Exster

www.candlemarkandgleam.com

For Caroline and Kavita, without whom

I could not have made this journey.

MAP OF THE WORLD



CONTENTS

Prologue	9
Chapter 1: A Crack in the World	13
Chapter 2: The Party is Over.....	25
Chapter 3: The Crowtaker	36
Chapter 4: Through the Mirror.....	53
Chapter 5: Things of Value	79
Chapter 6: Breaking Laws.....	95
Chapter 7: Wild Gods	111
Chapter 8: The Long Way Around.....	131
Chapter 9: Taking Shelter	152
Chapter 10: Roads to Nowhere.....	170
Chapter 11: High Places	195

Chapter 12: Falling Out.....	214
Chapter 13: Over, Under and Through	223
Chapter 14: Even Money	238
Chapter 15: Thin Walls	254
Chapter 16: Windows and Doors.....	269
Chapter 17: Sharp Edges	287
Chapter 18: Passage of Arms	301
Chapter 19: The Small Hours.....	314
Chapter 20: Far Travelers	324
Chapter 21: The Road Home.....	344
Epilogue.....	354

PROLOGUE

Three glasses of sparkling wine, and Eshu's world got soft at the edges. A thickset godling was saying something about fate and song—they'd been on that subject all night, young wizards and new gods and wry ink-stained poets alike—but Eshu couldn't make himself focus on the words. He was enraptured by the shape of that divine mouth, those full lips pressed together for each *M* and parting around each intimate *O*. There were galaxies drifting beneath the godling's night-black skin and stars tangled in his hair, glittering silver and citrine and amethyst. When his sunfire gaze turned Eshu's way, Eshu felt like the only man in the room. He ached for something to say that would let him hold that gaze again.

He lay back on his couch and closed his eyes, feeling the pulse of the music in his skin and the warmth of the lights. If he let himself drift like this, he could track the ebb and surge of the conversation: Mnorro defying fate in high, sharp terms; the godling rumbling gently about how the force of narrative logic created heroes and monsters; dour old Usamkartha explaining that a poet shaped not the world but how it was understood.

"A wizard tells the world a story about what it is, and the world answers, *Yes*," said the godling. His voice was the distant thunder of continental plates meeting and sliding against each other; it was the music of moons in their orbits. "Eshusikinde could tell us that. What do you say, Eshu?"

Eshu's eyes fluttered open. The lights were too bright and too many colors. His eyes swam; he uncoiled from the couch, and the world whirled underneath him. The godling's gaze was hot with something more than curiosity. His fingertips caressed the lacquered wood of his chair in a way that made Eshu's pulse leap. *Njo have mercy, and let me get fucked into the ground tonight.*

He licked his lips and tried to remember how to string a sentence together in Kiruuni. "A wizard doesn't just tell the world what it is—he has to tell that story so convincingly that the world *forgets* what it was before. It forgets gravity, and distance, and how fire consumes. It forgets the shape of mountains, and how seed becomes bloom. It even forgets what he is: just a mannequin of meat telling a story that can't possibly be true."

"A remarkable con," said Usamkartha. "The power of lying on a cosmic scale."

"The power of belief," the godling countered. "The unthinking world, too, has its faith."

"As I said. Belief isn't noble in itself; it just means a susceptibility to—oh, hello, Tuuri. Sit down. Have some wine."

Tuuri. The warmth drained out of Eshu's body. He looked up and into familiar, ice-green eyes.

Tuuri with his broad hands and heavy shoulders, who crafted airship engines and built mirror-ways. Tuuri, always the first to laugh and the last to forget a slight, with his slantwise jokes that someone else always wound up paying for. The man who'd lain with his hand over Eshu's heart and promised never to hurt him in a way he didn't ask for.

It was an ugly little promise. Men like Tuuri always found a way to say other people were asking for it.

Eshu rose from his couch without a word. He stalked out of their alcove and into the main room, where music drifted over the cushions and couches; strangers laughed, touched hands, sank their teeth into figs. He couldn't stand to watch it.

A hand brushed his elbow. He turned and found Mnoro there, her blue silk shawl rucked up around her ears and her heavy-lidded eyes serious. “Come back,” she said. “I’ll chase him off, if you like. He doesn’t have more right to be here than you do.”

“I have a headache,” Eshu said, which wasn’t strictly true, but it was better than explaining how ugly the world felt when Tuuri was in it.

Mnoro pursed her lips. She knew him well enough to recognize and ignore the lie. “Then we’ll both go. We can find a couch upstairs and talk about that comedy you loaned me. I feel like I’ve barely seen you since I left school. I miss you, Eshu.” For those last words, she dropped into their native language, and Eshu’s heart clenched at it. How many months had it been since someone had spoken to him in Kondalani?

He shook his head and answered her in kind. “I miss you, too. But I can’t stay while he’s here.”

“Are you going back to the university?” Mnoro asked. “Or home?”

Until that moment, he had planned to go back to his dormitory in Usbaran and nurse his anger with cheap wine and weeping. But at Mnoro’s question, he let himself imagine being back in his mother’s house, listening to the city wake for the dawn prayer. For him and for Mnoro, *home* would always be Kondala City.

“I haven’t decided,” he said.

Mnoro smiled. “If you go home, tell my mama I’m planning to visit for High Summer. Tell her this time I mean it. I’ve warned the department head—they’re not allowed to have any emergencies over the holiday.”

“If I go, I’ll tell her,” said Eshu. He made himself smile for her. “I’ll see you next time.”

“All right,” she said, and leaned up to kiss his cheek. “Read something nice, before then. I want you to tell me about it when you come back.”

“Promise,” Eshu agreed, kissing her cheek in turn. This seemed to satisfy her; at least, she let him go, which was close enough to the same thing.

He slid through the crowd toward the cloakroom by the front door, where he shrugged on his outer robe. The smooth cotton lining felt cool at first on his bare arms, but his skin quickly heated under the bulky, quilted fabric. Then back under the lights, into the scent of roasting goat meat and oranges and melons; a pair of wizards shouted after him, demanding to know where he was going when he hadn’t even said hello to them yet. He wasn’t sure he recognized them, so he made his excuses and slid away.

Eshu descended a brass stair worked with coiling vines, and into a cellar. Wine bottles stood racked all around him, some so old that the dust stood thickly on the glass. He crept through the well-trodden aisle between the racks, to a chamber no larger than a closet. A mirror stood there, illuminated by two lanterns with glass shades patterned like lilies. The mirror itself gave a faint blue glow, like moonlight on snow.

Eshu took a deep, steadying breath, put Tuuri out of his mind, and began to sing.

He sang the lays of secret ways—the stars that led the compass; the black currents tracing up the coast with ice on their backs. He sang the birds that spiraled home on the spring wind, and hunters shadowing the roads of ancient empires. He sang how the key knew the lock, how the tumblers clicked and turned—

—and he felt the world unlock around him.

He passed through the surface of the mirror as though through cool water. The light from the mirror behind him spread out in a long rectangle over rock and glittering sand. Beyond that, the Mirrorlands faded to twilight.

Pulling his robe closer around his shoulders, Eshu stepped out of his world and into the listening dark.

CHAPTER 1: A CRACK IN THE WORLD

Rukha was watching the horizon when she saw the lights over Sharis.

By the time the sun started to set, Rukha had been walking for several hours, and she had been heartily glad of the excuse to make camp. She'd used the last of the daylight to sight a tall tree with branches that looked stout and more or less parallel to the ground, and she'd climbed it with rope and pitons to hitch her hammock to a bough. This done, she had curled up in the cradle of it and watched the sun dip down beneath the ocean on the horizon.

It was a warm, dry night, with storm clouds patrolling the southern reaches. From her perch, Rukha could see the occasional, distant flash of lightning. The storms would blow through in a day or two, but with a little luck, she'd have made it to Sharis on the White Salt Bay by then. With a little extra luck, someone would be interested in buying plant specimens and mineral maps, and she'd have some spare money to book a berth on an airship home.

Not that it wasn't educational, she thought as she turned her gaze northward toward the distant glow of Sharis. *Can't learn about drainage basins without tramping through a few dozen of them. Lots of practice drawing streams.* But now, this close to the end of her journey, she longed for the comforts of home. Linen sheets. The sweet-hot scent of street meat fried in dough and pepper sauce. The organized clutter of the mapmakers' shop, where all her

favorite inks were in easy reach. She missed her parents, too, but that was a familiar ache; it was even odds whether they'd be in port or at sea when she got back.

You'll be home soon, she told herself. And if she could manage to get passage on an airship, she'd be able to check her work from above. She imagined looking down at those rivers and streams she'd come to know intimately, that she'd drawn with care and labeled in their local and legal names—the branching arteries of the land, creeks and hollows pumping sweet fresh water down to the ocean. Rukha was still thinking about those streams unspooling when the sky cracked open.

It was almost too far away for her to make out—just a jagged, bright tear in the clouds over the glittering city. *Like when a firework goes off*, she thought, but when it didn't fade, an uneasy feeling in her gut told her that this was no firework. That light lingered like a wound in the sky, and instead, the city lights began to go out. First the darkness swallowed the lights by the shore, then it swept swiftly inward in a widening arc: a vast wave of shadow crashing over Sharis, until only the crescent of the city's edge remained.

Then a crack like thunder sounded, and the entire forest shuddered as the earth rolled beneath it. Rukha's tree swayed perilously, nearly shaking her free; in every tree, birds rose clattering and monkeys screamed confusion. Rukha gripped her hitching ropes until the tremor passed, then edged along the branch below her to check where she'd tied up her supplies. It was too dark to see, so she wrapped her legs around the bough and sorted through her belongings by feel.

Backpack, pan, cup, spare rope, scroll case—everything was where she'd left it. She sighed in relief, then eased herself up again and back to her hammock. *Maybe I should sleep closer to the ground tonight*, she thought, testing the knots of her hitching ropes again. *An earthquake like that could uproot even these big old trees.*

As she glanced back to Sharis, she saw that the lights in the

sky were gone. Although Rukha waited for long minutes to see whether the city lights would come back, the city was still dark when she climbed down.

She hoped they were all right.



The storms came on faster than Rukha had expected, washing out the streambeds she'd been following and forcing her to take to high ground. When the rain fell so thick and heavy that she couldn't see more than a few steps ahead of her, though, she had to admit defeat. She holed up under a stony outcropping for a few hours, watching the rainwater pour in rivulets down the rocks to either side of her hiding place. Since she had nothing better to do with herself, she made a little fire to dry off her boots and whiled away the time weaving a broad, flat hat of palm fronds to keep the rain out of her eyes.

"If I get up in the air and find out that the whole river's shifted, I'm not going to start over," she decided. "They get the maps they get." Most of the time Rukha didn't mind being alone, but after the other night, it felt a bit eerie not to have heard another person's voice for over a week. It felt better to talk to herself, even if it was nonsense.

By the time she finally joined the road up to Sharis, Rukha was a day off schedule and well east of where she'd meant to be. Here, the forest had been cut back to make room for rice terraces and rows of taro root and ripening beans. The road was proper shell and gravel, which was nice after a few months of tramping through forests and bogs, and the heavy rains meant no one wanted to be on the road. *Probably even the airships are delayed—maybe even grounded*, Rukha thought. *I haven't seen any go by since the earthquake.*

No one came down the road from Sharis, either, which might've been good news or very bad news. Rukha had almost

expected a few refugee caravans, after whatever had happened out there. Spooked city folk drifting back to the countryside to hide away with their cousins and wait for the trouble to pass. For their sake, Rukha hoped it was good news.

Once the rains let up, she traded her hat to a farmer for a bowl of hot spiced taro mash. After she'd thanked him, she asked whether he'd heard or seen anyone from Sharis since before the rains started.

"Not for a few days," he said. "Peddlers aren't making the rounds like they usually do. Probably a fair number of shops knocked down in that earthquake."

"Probably," Rukha agreed. She wondered, later, if she should've told him about the lights—but by then it was too late to turn around, so she kept walking toward the city.

By now, she could make out buildings: the wizards' tower spearing toward the grey slate sky, and a copper-sheathed dome that might've been some kind of university or Hall of Law. Houses, most of them wood and plaster, a few made of limestone and white shell brick. No smoke rising from them. No lights, even when the sun started to slip toward the ocean.

She tried to remember the last time she'd been through Sharis: the docks, the boardwalk lined with crab sellers and net menders and pearl fishers shaking out their wet hair. There had been a good little bakery at the boardwalk's end, where they fried fish in batter and served it so hot it was still steaming when she bit into it. The birds had chased her all the way to the fountain in the middle of town, crying for bread. Those were the kinds of places she'd always loved best, those raucous seaside streets where everyone was always doing something and you could just sort of slide into the crowd and get lost for a little while.

This close to the ocean, the air always smelled of salt and fish and rot. But now, as the evening wind swept up from the water, Rukha smelled a deeper rot that made her stomach twist.

She reached the outskirts of town just as the sun touched the horizon. A couple of stray dogs growled at her as she passed, their tails down and ears back, but they slunk away when she turned to them. Everywhere was the smell of rotting meat, overpowering the ocean's thick salt musk.

Then she turned the corner at the Hall of Laws with its green copper dome, and she stepped into the white foam at the tip of the wave. Suddenly, with a lurch of nausea, Rukha understood.

Sharis had fallen into the sea. Waves crashed against the marble face of the Hall of Laws; gouts of water blew through the broken windows with a sound like a whale surfacing. Ahead of her, the road had sheared away, leaving a steep cliff that dropped deep into the water. Far below, so far that she could barely make out the angles of rooftops and sunken verandas, lay the lost city of Sharis.

All around her floated the many-days-dead.

By now, there was little left of them—tattooed limbs rotted free of their bodies, or swaths of fabric holding a corpse together. Bright green rags, edged with thread that glittered like silver. A body half-devoured by dogs on a nearby street. Faces with eyes eaten out by fish or birds. A foot in a little silk shoe with pearls on the toe.

Rukha's stomach heaved, and she sank to her knees and retched. It had been all day since she'd eaten, and nothing came out. Tears stung her eyes; she tasted bile and spat. She couldn't stop shaking. She tried to open her hands on her thighs and hold them still, but they shook all the same until they'd shaken into fists again. Her throat hurt from crying and heaving and crying again.

She wasn't supposed to see this. It was too big for one person to witness. Sharis had never been her city; it wasn't hers to grieve.

All of it, gone. The little bakery on the boardwalk and the fountain and the pearl fishers and—and all of it, under the water with the bodies of those who'd sunken already.

Slowly, Rukha became aware that someone else was watching her. She scrubbed fiercely at her eyes and wiped her hands on her

trousers, then pushed herself to her feet and turned around.

An old woman stood there, with the last sunlight spinning her white hair to gold. She was bare to the waist, muscular and heavily tattooed the way Sharisi sailors often were. *The way they used to be.* There was a belaying pin in her hand, but she didn't look like she planned to do any violence with it.

"Was this your place?" she asked. Her voice was raw, but clear and strong and carrying. Rukha shook her head. "Well, that's a mercy," the old woman said heavily. "Call me Shell."

An old superstition: when times were bad, when you didn't want to die and you could feel the Crowtaker breathing down your neck, don't give your name to strangers. Call yourself Tree, Cloud, Flower, Brick—so that if the Crowtaker pricked up her long ears, she'd pass you by. Shell was a safe name to give someone, when night was drawing down and the ocean was full of bodies.

Rukha swallowed down her own name and said, "Call me Fern." Rukha meant *rock*, and right now, she felt like the furthest thing from a rock.

"Well, then. Fern." Shell sucked in a breath through her teeth. "Sun's about spent, so it's time to get inside. There will be food for you, if you want it."

"Is there anyone else?" Rukha asked in a rush. "Is there *anyone* else alive here?"

"A few dozen that I've seen," Shell answered. She put a hand on Rukha's shoulder and started marching her back toward the edge of town. Her bare feet left a shining track on the paving stones. "The rest of 'em are holed up in the wizards' tower. Good view from the top. Seems safer than anywhere else."

"What about the wizards?" Rukha knew enough about geology to know that there wasn't a fault down the middle of Sharis, which left gods or magic. "Are they still here?"

Shell shook her head. "Went out through a mirror, probably. Leastways, they left most of their things. Can't figure out exactly

when they took off. Hadn't seen them for a while, but that wasn't odd. Kept to themselves, mostly—but now I wonder. Might've known something the rest of us didn't."

Or at least, they had a better way out when they saw the lights and felt the ground shake. "Is there anything I can do?" asked Rukha. "I have lots of maps; if you need directions to anywhere—"

"No," said Shell sharply. "If we wanted to go, we'd have gone. Some did. Me, I'm staying until I find my family."

They're probably dead, thought Rukha, but as she looked at Shell's wet trousers, she realized that Shell knew already. She wasn't looking for survivors. She was looking for something to burn or bury. "I can help, if you want," said Rukha. She reached up for Shell's hand and held it, and Shell gripped her back with fingers like iron.

"In the morning."

It hurt, not being able to do anything *now*. Rukha wanted there to be something she could find or hammer or carry that would make this ugliness right; she wanted some answer she could memorize, so that she could give it when asked and make sense of what had happened here.

There wasn't an answer. There was nothing to carry. The dark came down, and it was time for supper.

The wizards' tower was in better shape than the rest of Sharis, but there were a number of cracks in the white stone walls that said its foundation had shifted. Someone had painted the walls with big black letters on the seaward side: *SHELTER. ALL WELCOME.* A couple of the bright stained glass windows were broken, but after a second look, Rukha saw that they were broken in. *The door must've been locked when they tried to get inside,* she thought. Even now, the door canted on its hinges, but Shell lifted it straight and swung it open.

In the broad central rotunda, about two dozen people had made a camp. Blankets and bundles lay everywhere, covering

arcane mosaics of porcelain tile and gold; children chased each other around the blue-veined marble pillars and went skidding across the polished tile floor. The smell of incense hung on the air, driving back the stink of the dead.

“This is Fern,” called Shell as she entered. “She’ll stay with us a while. Find her a bowl.”

“She doesn’t look Sharisi,” said a younger man with sailor’s tattoos peeking over his collar. “Where’d you find her?”

“None of your fucking business; she’s alone and needs a meal,” Shell answered. “Excuse my son. He was born on a quarterdeck. No manners.”

“Excuse my mother; she’s got a mouth like a cannonade.” The man held out his hand, and Rukha clasped his wrist. “Call me Gull. You need a blanket?”

“I’ve got one,” she answered. “I’ve got a bowl, too.”

“One less thing to worry about.” He turned to his mother, who’d found a pipe somewhere and was lighting it to smoke. “Did you find anyone today?”

“None of ours,” she said. “Thought I had, for a while—your sister’s hand—but the tattoos were the wrong shape. She had arrowheads, you remember. This one was just triangles. And it had a ring I don’t remember. Not that I knew every one of her rings.”

“She loved that one with the green glass. Her emerald,” said Gull. He took out a pipe of his own and offered it to Rukha, who shook her head. “She might not even be here. I keep telling you, she’d signed to a ship last week. She might’ve sailed before the lights.”

“She wouldn’t have gone without saying goodbye to her mother. Not her.” A little girl ran shrieking past Shell’s legs, and Shell watched her go with her black eyes bright and distant. “No, she’s somewhere in the water, and I’m going to find her.”

That night, the last people of Sharis made their supper in the tower’s lavish kitchen, where a cookfire burned eternally without

wood or coal. They batter-fried fish and ate it with flatbread—no one had found yeast yet in the ruins—and then drank the wizards' sweet white wine on the floor of the rotunda.

After supper, some people strung up blankets between the pillars to curtain off some private space, but most didn't. *They've lost so many people, they want to be able to see who's still here*, Rukha thought. A girl of about thirteen gathered the younger children around to tell them a story about how the Sisters found the magic feather, and she kept telling it until even the oldest had started to nod off.

Rukha sat with her blanket across her lap and her back to a pillar, watching as Gull dimmed the lamps and Shell bundled children into bed. After the long walk and the bodies and crying and retching, she wanted desperately to sleep, but even the thought of doing so made panic well up in her throat. She didn't know what she was so afraid of—not just another earthquake, but something deeper and harder to name.

This morning, she'd been on her way to Sharis to book an airship back home. Now Sharis lay beneath the waves.

But Sharis had been underwater since the night she'd seen the lights. All this time, the world hadn't been what she'd thought it was. She didn't know the shape of it anymore, and she was afraid of waking up to find that it had changed again. Or maybe that it had never been the shape she'd known.

And under all of that was a worry so deep that she couldn't even let herself think it all the way: *What if the earthquake had broken Matis, too? What if she'd lost her home?* She'd heard of earthquakes so strong that people had felt them on both sides of the Kirami Sea. Matis was so much closer than Ras Kir'uun.

After a long time sitting in the darkness, Rukha heaved herself to her feet. By now, moonlight was streaming through the blue and green glass windows, and the night was full of the whistling snores of sleeping children.

"I'm going to look at the rest of the tower," she told Shell, who sat guarding the door with her belaying pin on her lap.

"Careful," Shell answered. "Take a lamp." She passed over a lantern shielded in a stout brass cage, along with the little hand-striker that she'd used to light her pipe.

"Thank you," Rukha answered.

A spiral stair circled the inner rooms of the tower, with round windows like portholes in every cardinal direction. Rukha levered one open and found that it overlooked the sea, and she lost several minutes watching the waves curl under the waxing half-moon. When she'd been little, her father had taught her a sailor's astronomy, and now she searched for the old, familiar constellations in the sky: the Fly, the Lotus, the Dragon with Four Heads. *It doesn't look like a dragon*, she'd said, a long time ago. She'd been a little shit when she was a child.

You have to teach yourself to see a dragon, he'd answered. *Tell yourself a story about it, so that every time you look at the sky, you see the story. And then you'll find the dragon—not in the sky, but in the story.*

Before the earthquake, this window must've looked out over the city. Some wizard must've stood here, watching carts trundle down the streets and ships put in at the port, seeing the city lights come on one by one as the dark drew down.

Rukha swallowed hard, then turned away.

She lifted her lamp overhead and turned her attention to the inner wall of the stair. At each landing, there was a door, some leading to empty offices and some to sleeping chambers with the blankets and mattresses dragged out. Behind one door, she found a library full of books chained to the shelves. The chains looked heavy, and they shone ominously in the lamplight.

Every room had been rummaged through at least a little, probably by the people downstairs—*Or by the wizards, when they left*, thought Rukha, remembering Shell's suspicions. But sometimes, she found a gold pocket watch still ticking tranquilly on a bedside

table, or a little bag of diamond dust lying beside a set of etching tools.

If the people of Sharis did leave, she hoped they took them. They deserved to start their lives over with something.

The door at the very top of the tower stuck, but Rukha gripped the handle the way Shell had downstairs and lifted it on its hinges until she could ease it open.

Before her feet spread out a mosaic map of the stars, with gold inlay linking the constellations and planets worked in chips of amber and comets trailing quartz tails across an onyx sky. Despite herself, Rukha gasped. She'd grown up with star charts, and once she'd even been to see the orrery at the Royal Museum of Ras Kir'uun, but this mosaic felt grander and sadder and more intimate than anything she'd ever seen before. She was alone with some artisan's great work, in a dead city, watching the gleam of her lantern kindle fire from the night sky.

After a moment, though, she realized that there was something else in the room. At the very center stood something tall and flat and covered with a sheet. *A mirror*, she thought. *Shell said the wizards left through a mirror.*

She paced across gold and quartz and amber to the mirror and fisted her free hand in the sheet, then pulled it down to puddle around the mirror's feet. In the silvered glass, she saw herself illuminated by lantern light: clothes travel-stained and shirt dusted with crumbs; round face and black hair down to her chin. Her eyes looked hollow and purple around the edges, and her lips were cracked and torn. She hadn't even noticed she'd been biting them.

"Fern," she told her reflection. When she reached out to lay a hand on the mirror's face, the glass fogged up around her palm. "Just Fern." It was harder to say, when that round Masreen face was looking back at her, but she'd get used to it.

She brushed the crumbs off her chest and turned to go. There weren't answers up here, either, but she felt a little calmer now. The

panic had sunk down to her gut again, where it churned as slow and steady as a water wheel.

Then there was a shattering sound, the tail end of a scream—and something came through the mirror and knocked Rukha flying.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.M. Tuomala lives in western New York, somewhere between Niagara Gorge and the Eternal Flame. In addition to hiking those sublime landscapes, Tuomala enjoys researching eighteenth-century science, collecting rocks, and building new worlds.

The
**ADVENTURE
CONTINUES ONLINE!**

Visit the Candlemark & Gleam website to

Find out about new releases

Read free sample chapters

Catch up on the latest news
and author events

Buy books! All purchases on the
Candlemark & Gleam site are DRM-free
and paperbacks come with a free digital version!

Meet flying monkey-creatures
from beyond the stars!*



www.candlemarkandgleam.com

*Space monkeys may not be available in your area. Some restrictions may apply.
This offer is only available for a limited time and is in fact a complete lie.

