

History as Interpreted by the Artificers

Herein lies the monumental effort devoted to a carefully constructed and structured record of Kroot History. This great assembly, compiled from what was originally a collection of traditions orally transmitted from one generation to the next, attempts to delineate the murky transitions between significant events that were loosely held by, but not clearly defined by the oral traditions, and thus create a formalised timeline that will be official and authoritative in regards to the subject in future references.

The Great Darkness

At the instance a Kroot is born into this world, his consciousness materialising into self-awareness, his perceived sensations of the real world are abruptly replaced by the dream-like sequence of an intensely dark and disturbing experience. It is said the birth-cries of a Krootling mirror the terror of those few moments, as their entire senses are enveloped by the madness of this Darkness. So severe is the strain of this experience on the Kroot psyche that it leaves its mark on the Kroot even unto adulthood. It can be said that the experience is never truly forgotten. It may be that its occurrence at the very instance of birth leaves a permanent impression upon the psyche of the Kroot, such that the scars of those moments, even if it only stretches past a few seconds, are enough to last a lifetime.

Even then, the severity of the experience is not recalled with the same level of intensity from each individual to the next, and at least in that department, the Kroot stray away from any similarity of experience. Some recall it as you would perceive an old injury, a dull thud eating mercilessly away at the senses. However, all describe the same perceived experience, the feeling of intense fear and a maddening desire to break away. Then there are some to whom the details appear in greater clarity, the memory of the Darkness more discerning and distinct. It is from such sources that we have gathered what may be of our ancient past, beyond even the times that we spoke of, when we had minds enough to speak. The memories depict a time of darkness and fear, products of a time of primordial ignorance, for the Great Darkness is of events so intense as to be impressed onto the psyche.

The Descent of the Burning Hunger

It seems that in the prehistoric past of our great jungle world, Pech was a much harsher environment to live in. It was a world that resided in primordial darkness, a place dominated by monstrous creatures and powerful beasts, yet unlit by the light of sentience. Prehistoric Kroot being avian animals, were relatively safe from the wild and dangerous ground where roamed and lurked the dangers of prehistoric Pech. With the genetic ability to alter the gene structure through consumption of flesh however, and as prehistoric Kroot were relatively small animals, they were primarily carrion eaters, and thus by the way of consuming dead and decaying land-dwellers, prehistoric Kroot evolved into flightless, bipedal creatures. Becoming grounded, they had to live alongside the dangers of the jungle, a harsh setting that proved overwhelming for early Kroot. Unsited to their environment, being either too big to hide or too small to face up to the many ravenous predators, early Kroot were out of place in an ecosystem they had no niche to fulfill.

For us during those early times of our race's existence, it appeared as if the Kroot was heading down a path of extinction, as had many animals not adapted enough to survive the harshness of the jungle. Being consumed entirely out of existence...that was the terror that took hold of early Kroot. Faced with the prospect of being hunted to extinction by the many deadly carnivores around them, our ancestors retaliated in fear, a fear that is ingrained into our psyche to this very day. Under enormous pressure from their surroundings, the world became an absolute terror for our ancestors. With no

place to flee from the dangers that lurked, and filled with the fear of death at the carnivorous creatures of the jungle, in the face of such pressure, a certain madness overtook our species. This maddening rage blossomed like a psychic shockwave, possessing all of our every intent and action. As if in retaliation to the circumstances of their existence then, early Kroot began to attack and consume blindly, even creatures several times their size. In response to their desperate circumstances, it appeared evolution triggered the catalyst that would allow the Kroot to ascend to be the dominant species on Pech. Whether it was a result of evolution, or just simply an inexplicable response to the pressures of their environment then, a burning hunger descended upon them, from the terror in their minds down to the urge in their guts. In the madness of that fear, the urge to consume completely dominated the minds of our ancestors.

Tackling anything on sight, multiple Kroot would bunch up on larger prey and feasted on it while it was still alive, and consumed till there was little left but the bare bones. In this way, a "forced" evolution took place within our ancestors, as the genetic ability of their guts to extract and splice beneficial genes of their prey allowed for the sudden surge of great growth of changes within the Kroot. This mass consumption of a varied number of flesh in such a rapid frame of time allowed for the appearance of these beneficial genes, in what would usually take several generations to gain form. The Kroot race diversified in an instant, but it was of minor consequence as many did not evolve enough to attain the necessary attributes to succeed. It is said that the early ancestors of the Kroot Hound and Krootox were a divergent branch that reached an evolutionary dead-end from this early period in Kroot history. So powerful is the burning hunger that it lingers within the successive generations to this very day. The vestiges of this primal force to consume within us can be alluded to this time in our evolutionary past.

Using the sciences we have now at our disposal, we have deduced the source of this burning hunger to be a retaliatory response from our minds that had been frozen in fear. As a necessary escape out of our predicament, our minds instinctively reacted to circumstances in the best way in lieu of the pressure of those circumstances. Thus, we call this initial event in our evolutionary history, "The Descent of the Burning Hunger"; a reaction from our minds down to our guts, triggering them into hunger, the genetic hunger that has come to define our great race.

The First Spark of Sentience

Among these early hunters, a strange distinction came to be made by them. They felt themselves aware, aware of their surroundings, aware of the possession of their bodies, when once there was no thought but to feed, endlessly, as an escape from the dark terrors of the jungle. Slowly, they came to feel the burning hunger that consumed them, and with this initial rise of awareness, that dire intensity that drove their insanity came to be controlled by them. This was the beginning of the first spark of sentience that arose among our race. Having now been able to curb the intensity of the burning hunger, and the fear of the Great Darkness receding from its initial madness, the Kroot were able to turn their attention to their newfound appendages that were proportioned and developed from their consumption of a certain simian-like creature's flesh. The Kroot being avian animals initially, had ill-adapted limbs for their existence on land, having only two fingers on each hand previously, hands that were developed after the talons of their avian ancestry. One beneficial gene apparent from this simian's flesh was the growth of a second thumb, that gave greater dexterity to the Kroot in the wielding of implements and tools.

It seems that the beginnings of this stage that brought about the rising of sentience in our race was due to the consumption of a simian-like humanoid in the vast jungles of Pech. This ape-like humanoid had the necessary tools within them to achieve sentience, and this species had just begun to exhibit early signs of intelligence. By consuming its flesh, our guts were able to extract the DNA sequence responsible for the gift of dexterous hands and powerful limb muscles, factors that proved

to be crucial for the succession of the Kroot as the dominant lifeform on Pech. With nimble fingers we were able to manipulate objects to form tools, which was necessary for our thought faculties to develop, thus spurting our intellectual growth. The Kroot had tasted awareness, and were still in the early stages of developing intelligence. The Kroot turned their new found intelligence to fashion tools out of wood and stone. One of these first tools developed was the spear, and with it they hunted the ancient predators of the jungle.

The Age of the Hunter

As early Kroot developed, with their new tools of the hunt, they became unchallenged predators, feared by even the largest of prey in the jungles of Pech. With the newly invented spears, they learnt to hunt animals by throwing them, utilising the same muscle groups of our physique which were used for climbing, gained from consumption of the tree-climbing simian creatures. With their unique musculature, they discovered the optimum transference of power into their throws were done with swift muscular contractions, creating a whiplash effect. Our early ancestors perfected this hunting throw, and it came to be regarded as the best way of hunting the more dangerous beasts of the jungle, attacking from a relatively safe distance. This hunting skill was passed on and is held as sacred by the Hunters of the kindred tribes. Through sheer practice, they attained an understanding that it should be the preferred method of hunting, that leads to the eventual mastery over the form. In fact, the use of the hunting throw to take down one of the great beasts of the jungle came to be a test of initiation into adulthood for young Krootlings. A favourite prey of our ancestors were the simian creatures of the jungle that resided in the treetops of the massive Jagga Trees. It appears we instinctively knew that the great simians of the jungle were responsible for the presence of sentience within our species, and hunted them as food for the growth of our intellectual capacity and the development of our consciousness. This selective hunting of the simians was solely responsible for the increase in acuity of our species' early awareness, that culminated during the time we call "The Coming of the Great Awareness". This is the reason we call this early epoch of our great history, The Great Instinctual Living, for even with as yet a partially developed awareness of our beings, we were still able to steer the course of our existence to the success of our race, by reliance on the instincts of our guts, in this sense "instinctually living".

This stage of Kroot history, from the earliest times when we were aware of ourselves, is called the Age of the Hunter. After a particular Hunter in fact, the one they call Ongkha Nhagar. He was known as the Hunter. As they lived, our ancestors instinctually hunted the predator beasts and simian creatures that were to be instrumental in the evolutionary success of our race. We both feared and honoured the powerful feline hunters, the very creatures we hunted as equals, and perhaps something more. There was one creature that stood out though, in our selection of prey then: the ape. The one creature whose flesh we craved, yet stood out against our senses as being neither a respected hunter, nor a feared beast. It had none of the qualities of the carnivorous hunter that we desired, by all accounts it should appear an unworthy prey. Perhaps its draw to us, we reasoned with our burgeoning intellect, was that it was capable of standing on two legs, like us. In fact, the genetic hunger of our race, the ability to alter our genetic structure through consumption of flesh, came with an instinctual awareness of what food would be most beneficial to our evolutionary growth. We select them unconsciously even, proven by our taste of the simians' flesh. It appears that the Kroot named Ongkha Nhagar was closely attuned with this instinctual awareness, such that it came prominently into his awareness. Thus aware, he selectively took to hunting the wild apes of the jungle, and had a particularly strong craving for their flesh. This stood out particularly, because he knew exactly why it was this species that he hunted down. He knew it as the flesh that would grant him insight, that would bestow incredible intellect and widen the light of sentience already within him. Already possessed with powerful genetic instincts, he finally consumed so many simians that through sheer mass of quantities, their genetic structure was rapidly processed by his body, allowing him to manifest the appearance of those beneficial genes that would have otherwise taken several

generations to settle, such that within a span of short years, he had grown to a level of intellect far surpassing the average Kroot of that age and time.

In addition to increased intellect, his musculature became extremely powerful, and was composed of dense fiber spindles with a greater power-to-mass ratio than is found in his fellow Kroot. All these evolutionary changes were from consuming the simians' flesh. This was at a stage when we had yet to achieve the exceptionally powerful arm muscles that have become intrinsic to our race. Observing this, that our race was still insufficiently evolved to be completely adapted to their native surroundings, Ongkha Nhagar vowed to use his massive intellect to the benefit of his kindred, leading them in a hunt of the simians of the jungle. Understanding that he alone possessed the insight into the genetic hunger, he would effectively steer the course of our race in this early time of our evolution, by leading our ancestors in a hunt of select prey that possessed desirable traits. They were selected based on their power, their grace, their speed, their balance, their skill, their strength, and their ability. Thus he was responsible for providing the genetic template that future generations would succeed. It can be said that he was the first Shaper. In any case, he was the first leader that unified the disparate tribes and kindreds.

With his profound intelligence, he took the opportunity of hunting one of the monstrous dinosaurs that roamed the land single-handedly before several tribal chiefs, as he sought to charismatically garner their attention. With great accuracy, he threw a spear at the jugular of the animal, bringing it down with one blow. Watching with awe at this great hunting feat, the head of all the chiefs, Khorwat Naihom the Brave took to addressing this person. Answering with his given name, the Kroot promised to teach them the hunting techniques he possessed and grant them great power of mind and body. But first, he had to teach them of the Spirit. As the Kroot's consciousness and intellect were not fully awakened and refined, they had little awareness yet of the Spirit Ongkha spoke of, their Spirit that bind mind and body. Understanding this, Ongkha took to explaining to them his philosophy, that he called the Spirit-Eater, or Vei-Ut, of what he understood of the higher functions of their body, namely the genetic hunger. He believed that by devouring his prey whole, their Spirit is eaten by him, and transmuted by his digestive system into a part of his being, thus gaining their abilities. Khorwat Naihom and his tribe became the first to adopt this philosophy of thought, in regards to the genetic hunger and the selective consumption of prey, becoming the first Spirit-Eaters.

Khorwat and his tribe initially encountered great difficulties in processing the concepts of the Spirit-Eater, but were taught that it was an intrinsic ability that they already possessed within their genetic template, and that it was unconsciously a part of them whenever they consumed flesh, whether they were aware of it or not. After being taught this much of the gift of the genetic hunger, Ongkha Nhagar took to leading them on a hunt of the select prey that they wished to imbue their genetic structure with. Ongkha particularly focussed on hunting the great simians of the jungle, and there was an order of seniority when it came to feasting on their flesh, with Khorwat at the top being first to eat, while the younger Krootlings would be last in line to consume the simians' flesh. Khorwat Naihom the Brave was known for taking great risks as he hunted the most elusive and powerful of the simians, at times in reckless disregard for his safety, with the same bravery that earned him the respect and seat of leadership of his tribe. With his successful hunting of the most formidable of the simians, his feasting of their flesh provided accelerated growth to his genetic pool compared to his peers, second to only Ongkha. In this way, Khorwat, who had deferred the leadership of his tribe to Ongkha, came to possess tremendous intellect, like his master and chief. As Khorwat studied under Ongkha however, he began to think that this philosophy was inherently flawed, and does not cover exactly the process of the genetic hunger. He would later diverge in thought from this philosophy and develop his own philosophical theory, or perhaps religion, which he called the Great Spirit, or Reyuk Vei. The Great Spirit teaches that there is a Great Spirit that resides within all Kroot and in fact all beings, and that contains all the genetic data and knowledge of each and every being. By

consuming a certain prey, that knowledge of the Great Spirit within the Kroot is unlocked. One teaches that by consuming prey, part of the prey is selectively absorbed by the Kroot, while the other teaches that the prey's "Spirit"(genetic data) is already a part of the Kroot, but has yet to be accessed, and by consuming the prey, the "genetic structure"(Spirit) of the prey becomes one with the predator, completely assimilated by the Kroot. The Great Spirit is thus akin to the genetic template within all beings.

Only a select few were ever privy to the philosophy of the Spirit-Eater, Khorwat being one of them, and also the council of elders of the tribe. However, Ongkha's hunting techniques were passed down to the entire tribe. They were formalised into a code, the Skill Code of the Hunter, or the Hunter's Code of Prowess, the code by which all future generations of Hunters abide by, through their proficiency with the Hunting Spear and the entire act of hunting itself. Within the code are laid out the degrees of difficulty when it comes to throwing the spear and approaching the more elusive carnivorous predators, with the feline hunters at the top of this gradient, and all Hunters are graded on this scale. The highest degree of skill is one where a great monstrous beast is slayed with a single blow, and the Code states that: "Aim with forceful impact at the jutting jugular of the animal. No matter the size, the animal will have a weak point." At a time when hunting was the way of life for the kindred tribes, Ongkha Nhagar's formalisation of the Skill Code was accepted by all the various kindreds, and was the one strand of commonality that united them. It was through the Code that the kindred tribes rallied under Ongkha Nhagar's leadership, and he taught them all he knew of his hunting techniques through the Code of Prowess. With the Hunters of the tribes inducted into his hunting techniques, he led them in a hunt of select prey, most discriminately, the apes of the jungle, or as they came to be called, Vithepha, or "Intelligent-flesh". The Vithepha had great strength in their forearms, which were developed for climbing, but the speed and grace of the Kroot Hunters with their formidable Hunting Spears made them appear unworthy foe, as they were easily outwitted and outmatched from thrown spears. However, the Vithepha had their own defence; by climbing up the tall Jagga Trees and residing in safety within the treetops, they were hard to approach and evaded our most adept Hunters. Notwithstanding, the Kroot, which had evolved their arm musculature from feasting on the Vithepha, had considerable climbing prowess too, and thus a deadly game of cat and mouse began, with the Kroot Hunters climbing after the faster, more agile climbers, the Vithepha, and lobbing their spears when they were judged to come within range of their throw.

Near the end of this Age, under the astute leadership of Ongkha Nhagar the Hunter, the Vithepha were hunted till extinction. Their gene sequence so cherished by the Kroot continued to be carried on within the blood of the Kroot. This way, their genetic data was preserved in future generations to come, and the lineage of sentience and the unique climber's musculature were carried down through the ages, forever imprinted into the genetic template of the Kroot. Ongkha Nhagar realising the extinction of the Vithepha, turned his attention to other potential prey, targeting the monstrous thunder lizards of the jungle, gigantic dinosaurs that towered above the treetops, remnants of a primordial age of darkness. He reasoned that the last obstacle that would prevent the Kroot from rising as the dominant species on the planet of Pech was none other than those primordial terrors of the Great Darkness. Among all the kindreds, he appointed the Knarloc Kindred to hunt specifically these beasts, for he reasoned that the flesh of such powerful and enormous beasts would provide great evolutionary data for future generations. Several generations down, this kindred ultimately evolved into the Knarlocs, together with the subspecies, the Great Knarloc, morphing into the stature and size of the thunder lizards, but losing sentience in return, for the huge size of the Knarlocs prevented them from having large brains, due to the strain on the heart from pumping blood through such big bodies. The Knarloc kindred inherited the immense size and powerful beaks, the bipedal stature and the long, thin, talon-like claws of the Giganpha, or "Titan-flesh".

The Age of the Warring Tribes

It came to be that the Kroot, now in a much more successful position in the food chain of the ecosystem, proliferated, no longer low in the pecking order and prey to all sorts of predators, as it was during the time of the Great Darkness. The worst enemy they came to face was that of their own kin, and they faced space and food constraints that put the early tribes in a position of contention. Now at the end of this first Age, Ongkha Nhagar harboured plans in his mind, dark plans that he placed into action. All along one of the tenets of the Spirit-Eaters was the preservation of the dead's genetic data, by consuming their corpses. Ongkha Nhagar should have been contented with this, but no, the greed in his heart won over his rational senses. Secretly he sought to hone his already pronounced command over the genetic hunger, by consuming the flesh of his fellow Kroot. As there were little dead among them due to the efficiency of the Skill Code, he took the lives of several of his subordinates against their will. Upon learning of this treachery, Khorwat confronted Ongkha, before the assembled kindreds, and banished him for his most unforgivable act. This was thought to be what prompted Khorwat to develop the theory of the Great Spirit, a philosophy of thought that ceased with the barbaric act of devouring their own dead, as since by default, it is thought the same genetic template(Great Spirit) exists within the living Kroot and the dead, to discourage a similar treachery from happening again. In addition to this, it was necessary in the religion of the Reyuk Vei to worship the animals they hunted and preyed upon, to invoke the blessing of the Great Spirit within the animal when they consumed its flesh. With the exile of Ongkha Nhagar and his followers, the Veiuts, to the Northern Marshes, it was thought that Khorwat his right hand would inherit the command of the collective kindreds, but it was not to be. After the departure of Ongkha Nhagar, the tribes, faced with contention of resources and space, took to fighting one another. It was the time of the Age of the Warring Tribes.

The Age of the Warrior

The Kroot discovered that from their selective hunting of the key predators of the jungle, during the time of Ongkha Nhagar the Hunter, they had attained a honed physique and fast reflexes. Their already prodigious hunting and fighting skills were augmented. This promoted the rise of another type of role in the tribe, the role of the Warrior. Now, in addition to hunting, fighting became another aspect of life in the jungle, as kindred took to fighting kindred due to tight space constraints and lack of food. This led to the expansion of Kroot territory across the world of Pech. Fighting continued until each separate tribe travelled far enough apart and had enough space for it to live without coming into conflict with another tribe. From then on, most of the fighting took place along the borders that delineate the territories of the tribe. The role of the Warrior was to safeguard the borders of the territory of their tribe. This carried on, with the Kroot kindred tribes travelling farther and farther apart, till they had covered most of the ground of the main continent of Pech. Along with the rise of the role of the Warrior, came a new weapon of invention: the Fighting Staff. It is a simple wooden staff with two stone blades etched into either end, but with it, the Warriors fought by snapping one end of the Fighting Staff after the other, utilising the same swift muscular contractions as when throwing a spear. Armed with the Fighting Staves, they took to their battles, battling for honour, for glory, and most importantly the safety and possession of their lands. The era became defined by the role of the Warrior, and it is by this reason that this age was also called the Age of the Warrior. As deaths piled up, and with the feeding of the dead prohibited by the religion of the Great Spirit, the wars were decided to be too costly, thus resulting in the establishing of the Warrior's Code of Honour, a set of guidelines determining the conditions for battle, and for determining the loser in a battle without unnecessary bloodshed. The Warriors who abide by the Honour Code knew when to back off when the fight is obviously over, and be sure to stay their hand, to prevent unnecessary bloodshed, while the losers would be sure to retreat instead of persisting in their agenda. All this was well as the death toll came to a minimum, with slight, occasional casualties.

However, some of the more stoic Overseers felt this was insufficient to curb the losses to the

kindred tribes with each conflict, as precious genetic material were being lost with each death to the tribes, and decided on a ritualised battle fought between two chosen champions from respective sides. The outcome of the ritual battle and the fight between the champions would settle the dispute between both parties, with the winner having his say on the matter. For the ritual battle, or the Ritual Duel, the weapon designed was a hefty, heavy blade, deliberately made so as to slow the movements of the Champions. It was called the Duelling Blade, and even during times of war, the Champions of the Ritual Duel would carry this hefty blade to battle, using its great weight to their advantage by smashing their foes in half. During the Ritual Duel itself, the Champions would not shed blood unless most necessary, instead preferring to smack the side of the blade across the body through the gaps in the defences of the loser. If the losing Champion is entirely persistent despite the apparent, the winner might have to shed firstblood, with the tip of the Duelling Blade. Despite the limits and drawbacks of the huge, hefty blade, the Champions fight with much grace and style, and the duels are often long and drawn out, with neither side giving ground, testing the skills of the warriors to their bounds. Even with the deadly blades, such is the skill of the Champions that blood is never let, only when a side is lost.

The Coming of the Great Awareness

All along our ancestors were not wholly aware of the entire scope of their being; while the physical senses were sharp, the ability to process their subconscious awareness was limited and indistinct in comparison, resulting in a lack of understanding of the nature of the higher realms of thought, and thus access to our race's true potential. The light of sentience though manifested, was as yet still dim. It seems the genetic material absorbed several generations ago were finally taking fruit; the genes of the Vithepha were finally being assimilated into the genetic code of the Kroot, taking form in physical emergences at first, with the presence of finely dense fiber spindles and a unique climber's musculature. This eventually led to an event documented as "The Coming of the Great Awareness", the blossoming of the intellect of the large majority of our Kroot ancestors from its burgeoning state. All of a sudden they were overtaken by a sharp awareness of their being and experienced a dramatic increase in their intellect. A great awareness descended upon them, and the hues of this world appeared more distinct, the flavours more intense. Their heightened awareness was assailed by a load of newly realised sensory information that they never knew existed, and the overload of thoughts overwhelmed them. It was in part due to the growth and prominence of the sensory quills that protruded from the back of the brain, ganglia that were vestigial remains of their ancestry as carrion birds. These ganglia imbued the Kroot with a sixth sense, gifting them the ability to detect pheromones released by fellow Kroot as a trail in order to mutually grant awareness of each other's locations, for better cooperation during a hunt or on a battlefield. Prior to this moment, only a few Kroot had full attainment of the scope of their awareness, and that was Ongkha Nhagar, and Khorwat Naihom and the Elders of his Kindred, the Raki. All others led a dim existence, only somewhat aware of their sentient feelings and thoughts, a situation that decreased with the consumption of the Vithepha. This dramatic change came as a shock to our early ancestors, and they were befuddled and confused without the guidance of the one that led them to possess these traits in the first place, Ongkha Nhagar. The experience was overwhelming, as they were bombarded by an influx of sensory information. They were frightened by the new world confronted by them, with all its myriad sensations and the confounding thoughts that were invoked with their sentient awareness. At about this time, across the world of Pech, great shifts in the tectonic plate were bringing about massive changes in the world around them. Great earthquakes shook the ground, and lightning serrated the skies, as the volcanoes of those primordial times became active and spewed hot lava across the lands. Kroot fell to these environmental changes and the fear of those times increased. In their confusion and fright, they came to view this seemingly new world with superstitious regard.

The Age of Superstition

Afraid of the new fires that lit up the night, and of the angry shaking ground, they huddled up in the safety of their groups under the watch of their Overseers, hiding in the caves they could find, away from the fiery sky. Our Kroot ancestors, unable to control and make sense of these changes in the world around them, started coming up with superstitious beliefs to explain their fear of the new world. They started claiming the spirits of the dead were angry and were roused from their slumber, the loud thunder their anguished cries. The earth which ate up their bodies was shaking with their collective fury, and from their restless deaths, they have awakened once more to seek vengeance upon the living. They prayed to the dead in order to placate their spirits, and thus began the tradition of ancestor worship that is carried on till today, the religion of the Ancestor Spirit, Sarkio Vei. When their prayers were to no avail against the anger of the lands and sky, they began to blame Khorwat and his foolish religion, the Reyuk Vei. Had the dead been consumed along with their spirits, they would not rise once more to bother them in the afterlife. They rose in a great uproar, shouting their curses at Khorwat, accusing him for the circumstances they now faced. All of a sudden, lightning struck the trees of their vicinity, and the crowd was stunned into silence. A branch dropped from the sky, flaming and burning at the tip. None amongst the people who had come to throw their rebuke dared raised their voice then or made any moves, scared into impotence by what must only be an unholy omen from the wrath of the spirits. Khorwat the Brave stood before the burning branch, and paused for a bit, contemplating what was before him. After some thought, he took it for an object of curiosity and made a move towards the branch. The people watched in horrid fear at the sight before them, the Krootlings clinging to their mothers while the adults flinched in terror.

The Fire-Dawn

"He will be devoured by the Spirits! What is he doing?! Does he not know the danger he is in? That must surely be the spirits' curse!", they shouted, but still Khorwat persisted, approaching the flaming branch. Just before he reached out for the branch, the crowd of onlookers' hysteric shouts reached a crescendo, then stopped. Bending down on one knee, he took up the burning branch, examining the curious flames that lingered on its tip. Marvelling at it, he brought it up high into the light, and it shone so brightly that it dazzled the sights of the onlooking crowd. "Ooooh!", they exclaimed, at the fascinating sight before them. "He must surely be a great prophet!", they whispered among themselves. Noticing the fire ate at the wood of the branch, Khorwat was further intrigued. Wishing to be alone with this new found, he wielded the flaming branch in a wide arc around him, and the onlookers who were before brimming with wonder and awe, were now filled with dread, as they recovered their senses and recoiled in fright away from the bright arcs of the "spirits' curse", and in so doing, Khorwat scared off the onlookers.

Khorwat sat down with the branch in his hand, deep in thought, at times appearing so still as to make the crowd who dithered nearby to think he was asleep, only to startle them when he proceeded to prod the flaming end, ever so carefully. Not daring yet to touch the mysterious substance full-on, Khorwat was contented with feeling the warmth that it gave off. Not realising the fire had eaten its way into the part of the branch that he held however, he dropped the branch in pain and shock. The fire had ate its way down to the part of the branch that he held, and burnt the part of his hand closest to the flame. Recoiling in pain, he gripped his burnt hand and soothed it by blowing at the burnt area. Suddenly, a great realisation came over him. He realised the mysterious substance had properties that he, and indeed all Kroot, shared with. The fire had eaten away the branch, as if it was living flesh! How strong! How fierce! Thus he learnt first hand of the power that fire possessed, and the pain it could inflict. Satisfied with his contemplation, he stood up, and abruptly faced the crowd that still hanged on the edge of the glow the fire emanated over the ground.

The hushed whispers of the awaiting Kroot as they observed Khorwat and his actions ceased immediately, and they all looked in trepidation at Khorwat, anticipating what was to come. Khorwat spoke with a great voice over the assembled kindreds, speaking of his great realisation, of the

mysterious substance which he had decided to call Rakui, after the rasping sound it made, and after the name of his Kindred, the Raki. He exclaimed that surely what that lay in his hand was none other than a part of the pure spirit of the Great Spirit! He reasoned that the Great Spirit should surely be composed of this etheric-like substance. Thus he came to proclaim that the Great Spirit was none other than the Rakui Vei and possessed the power to feast on all manner of objects. It was the power of their God! He went on to say, that in his long contemplation, he came to the realisation that the Rakui Vei was located within their guts, which gave rise to the powerful hunger that dominated them, and was responsible for acting on the flesh they ate with great intensity, utterly consuming the flesh with powerful fires, and thus digesting it. The Rakui Vei feasted on the manner of the flesh and granted the powers it possessed, imbuing the Kroot with the abilities of the consumed prey. Thus he declared the worship of their own guts, where the presence of their God was, and taught that it was a God exclusive to the Kroot, that feasted on the flesh of the numerous prey throughout the jungles indiscriminately. Consistent worship of the Rakui Vei will grant the Kroot the power to digest all manner of flesh, and perhaps even objects as well.

With that thought, Khorwat took to eating all manner of objects, even rocks, in order to prove his theory and invoke his God. With great fervour, Khorwat took to his belief, attempting to digest the toughest of substances, to prove the existence of the fiery Rakui Vei within their guts, that he believed will surely act on the objects he ate, flesh or not. However the fiery fires of the Rakui Vei failed him, and Khorwat was forced to regurgitate the objects he ate. Khorwat was compelled to rethink his belief, and went into a deep meditation on the subject, unperturbed by the rest of his kind. The Kroot watched in wonder at brave Khorwat, great Firestarter of the Kroot, Starter of the Fire-Dawn. They waited for a response of some new discovery from Khorwat, and they were not disappointed. In his great contemplation, he thought of eating the Rakui, since he had come to eat all manner of objects anyway. From this action he could learn much of their mysterious affinity with the Rakui. His flesh was scathed by the heat of the hot flames, but he managed to extinguish it as well. He came to the rational conclusion that there must be a fire-breathing creature that could contain this fire within them, and was responsible for the lightning, the "sky-fire", that could be seen in the skies above them. Rousing himself from his deep meditation, he approached the assembled kindreds, and told them of his second great realisation, concerning the origins of their God. He reasoned that since the flaming branch came from above, from the fire of the sky, the great forks of fire that lit the night had to come from somewhere else in their great world. From that tall place their God breathed fire onto this earth, and it must be a place of considerable height. They looked to the highest of the lands, gazing upon Giganmalok, or "Giant Mountain", a great, mountainous shadow in the distance, and above it, at a sky shattered with lightning.

The Great Age of the Fire Spirit

From that high place these Rakuipha, "Fire-flesh", breathed fire that lit up the skies with fierce splendour. They were the offsprings of their God, and were thus gods themselves. The religion of Rakui Vei compels its adherents to worship these creatures in place of their God. In all respects they should emulate their God as closely as possible, and as such, Khorwat made the demand that those who would follow him must go through a trial by fire, as a test of their bravery and devotion, by eating fire before him. Thus came the first warrior priests of the Rakui Vei, the Fireeaters. Wishing to become true adherents of the creed of their religion, that is to possess the traits of their Creator, Khorwat sought a means to gain the powers of their God, to breathe fire just as he could eat it. He harboured a secret ambition within himself, to seal away the Spirit of the Rakuipha within his own body, by consuming their flesh, the flesh of the gods. And for that purpose, he organised the First Great Hunt, an event that would spark the beginning of a great passionate rousing of the spirit of their people, or so declared in his own words, a Great Hunt that will call the first adherents of their new creed, the Fireeaters, to join him in a hunt of their great gods, who existed high on Giganmalok, a hunt that had the secret purpose of allowing the Kroot to gain possession of the gift

of Fire.

It was to be a period of great religious fervour amongst the Kroot. All day and night they would be roused with standing speeches of their great God and the lesser beings at His side, the Rakuipha, for which the First Great Hunt was dedicated to. Just like their God who is of Fire, the Spirit of the Kroot is akin to fire, passionate and blazing. Of the fiery Spirit first taught to them by Ongkha the Exile, when he was known as the Hunter, they now know this: it lived on, deep within their spirit, felt beneath like hot iron within the soul. Their bodies burnt with the ecstatic releases of energy the trances that their wild dances would put them in, as they listened enthralled to these fiery speeches. Because from this realisation, many great acts of fiery spirit came to be committed, an era of searing passion would follow. In great states of ecstasy, multiple Fireeaters would gorge on all manner of objects, as if to test the very limits of their guts. As they provided none in the way of new genetic material, these feats were at best inspiring and religiously paid homage to their God, but had no lasting worth. Other Firestarters would carry up the torch, and bear on the spirit of Khorwat's religious idea, after the departure of Khorwat and his Fireeaters on their Great Hunt, acting regents in his place. The Firestarters, imbibed and within the grasp of rapturous inspiration, would arise with great rallying speeches, spurring the crowds into a mad ecstatic zeal.

The Kroot danced their trances of ecstasy in the midnight, under the gaze of bonfires. They send up their voices in emotional releases, gratifying in the feeling of being alive. At the height of rapture, they expend their energies even past exhaustion; there is no stopping the rhythm of life. The frantic beat of the music intermingles with the sensuous moves of their frolicking bodies, moving to a tune that soars the spirit. "We are as fire, hot and untameable." Those are the words orated by their wisest now in this moment of revelry, their speeches the song to their dance.

Of the actions committed then, the practical worth of many would be questionable, but undoubtedly they were of strong and impassioned spirit. Nonetheless, they were a fervid display of the intense emotions of our people, long since harboured from the influx of the multitude of sensations of that very day when we gained sentience, and it blossomed within us like a psychic shockwave. In that same instance, these fiery speeches that spurred and bound itself to the psyche of our people would cultivate the minds of our kind into a strong-willed and adaptable species, flexible yet imbued with an unyielding passion for life and the trump of life, food. Food was the most commonly mentioned substance in their fiery advocations, and would be the fuel that stoked the fire of the blazing spirit that was the Kroot, and the spurt of progress that would overtake us soon. In many ways, these speeches were an art, an expression of intensity from deep within the formerly burgeoning psyche of the Kroot populace. Now unbound of superstitious fear with the great discovery of Khorwat Naihom, Brave Firestarter of the Fire-Dawn, they were embraced and relished in, former fears would be overtaken by a burning curiosity for all things sensory and intellectual, and all the spheres of the conscious would be laid bare in this Great Passionate Movement.

Seeing the spirit of his people emblazoned with such fierceness, and being at the edge of a new revolutionary epoch, Khorwat addressed his people as such, declaring a new age upon them. No more were they in the epoch of The Great Instinctual Living, where they lived barely sentient and teetering on the edge as mere beasts, but they were now forever to embrace their destiny as an intelligent and sentient race, and there was no looking back from then on. It was the epoch of The Great Passionate Movement, where emotion was emphasised above all, emotion being the driving force and stimulus for all things produced then, long withheld and suppressed out of ignorance and held back by superstition and the fear of the unknown. In the previous epoch before, body and the physical were held as sacred above all else, because that was all they knew within their limited sentience.

Many great philosophies were spoken in vehement oratories that shook the very foundations of the

early Kroot civilisation. These would go on to spark huge movements within the greater Kroot populace, stirring them to accomplish great feats of science and philosophy, in their heightened ecstasy. With the advent of fire, the Kroot could finally learn to master the arts of forging and crafting, creating weapons made not of stone but of iron. This stood as a hallmark of achievement in the evolution of the Kroot race, as now they were further enhanced as even deadlier adversaries of the animals of the jungle, and their stance as the prime predators of the jungle was further strengthened and solidified. All of these heralded a new era for the Kroot, a new plateau of racial advancement, and forever sealed their state as the most prolific and successful species in the jungle world of Pech.

As with many of the great acts of achievements towards the greater progress of the Kroot species, during this time of passion, one of them was the herding of their evolutionary cousins, distant offshoots of the Kroot race that were formed during the time of the Great Darkness, when the Kroot in their instinctively induced recklessness, consumed as many prey of indiscriminate origin. Among these are the Kroot Bird, the Krootox and the Kroot Hound. The Krootox evolved from the consumption of the Bluntox, Ghorpha or "Horn-flesh", a type of hornless oxen found on Pech. The hornless oxen is actually more closely classified as a class of the ape family, the Vithepha, except this is a misnomer as the Bluntox does not have the intellectual hereditary imprint of the True Ape. This is interesting as a cousin of the genetic forebear of the True Ones led to an evolutionary deadend to a portion of their kind. The Rahkpha, or "Fang-flesh" was an animal closely akin to the wolf of ancient Terra, and was utterly consumed into extinction by early Kroot during the Age of Darkness. These Kroot Hounds were herded by the True Ones as watchdogs and guard dogs. The Kroot Bird is an interesting example of evolutionary randomness. It appears the Kroot Bird is a direct evolution from our primordial form of the Kroothawk, and evolved from the consumption of a variety of prey that were insufficient to alter the base genetic structure of our primordial heritage, and instead added onto and supplemented the splicing of genes in such a way as to keep our primal form and genetic hereditary imprint intact. This form of our evolutionary cousins however, is neglecting the unique genetic splicing ability that were intrinsic to our ancestry, presumably lost through the different preys consumed by this particular species of animal during the Great Darkness.

The Age of Shadows/The Age of the Assassin

Having developed across the greater landmass of Pech, the Kroot established themselves as the most prolific of the indigenous species of Pech. Territories clearly defined, border skirmishes were at a minimum, and the Ritual Duels largely became ceremonial and unnecessary. With Khorwat still not returned from the Great Hunt, the leaders of the various Kroot kindreds were left largely to themselves to decide the movements and fate of the greater Kroot populace. A slow progression towards a unified Kroot state seemed prospect and a rising sentiment shared by a large part of the leadership, but as of now, with no discernible being capable of replacing the leadership of either Ongkha Nhangar or Khorwart Naihom, the kindreds, established as they were, carried on the traditions of Ritual Duelling as a practice of keeping the hierarchy of the kindreds in line, and the powers of the greatest of them in check.

Settling their differences through this relatively reliable and prudent tradition, the rivalry of the kindreds were to increase with the rising prospect of a unified Kroot nation, as the Kroot became progressively more cultivated with the advancements of The Great Passionate Movement. This competition led to a strict observance of the art of Ritual Duelling, with a habitual conduct of the Ritual Duels. As these Duels became more frequent, so did the ambitions of the Kroot Overseers likewise, with an increasing occasion for political exertions during these practices. It turned out then, when the anvil struck home, it came from a most insidious source.

In one of the northern territories, there resided an Overseer, who was born a son with a unique and rare anomalous skin condition; albinism. Initially appalled by the strange stark white appearance of his son, whom he had named Naghor Takhin, the Overseer would never know that in time to come he would become the greatest of the Kroot leaders; the Tactician. This child of his would grow up stigmatised and ostracised by others of his kind within the kindred, and the name he bore in shame when he was young would be borne with honour in time to come: The Albino Child. Witnessed by him in the dark of the night, a strange visitor came to his father, offering him a chance of raising the status of his outcast kindred. Although his kindred was designated as the guardian of the north, overseers of the Exiles of the Veiuts, he knew that it was all a guise to distance them from the greater workings of Kroot politics, due to his falling out with several important kindred Overseers. Thus, instead of seeing through the scheme of Ongkha Nhagar for what it was, he gladly took up the offer of the charge he was left to look over. Although very much apart from the larger portion of Kroot civilisation, his kindred still took part in the Ritual Duels that settled and established the gradients of power between the Kroot kindreds. Ongkha became an advisor to the Overseer, and he supplied him with Champions to fight in the Ritual Duels, warriors with powers so potent that they even bested the best of the Champions of the more powerful kindreds. These warriors were to remain largely unknown to the rest of the Overseer's kindred, except to a few of the more closely regarded Elders. Ongkha himself took a hand in the training of young Naghor Takhin, teaching him the various techniques of survival acquired by him in his stay of exile in the Northern Marshes. Noticing the shift of powers with the entry of this new breed of warrior Champion, the Overseers started questioning the upstart outcast kindred. Sent with a deployment of Jaguar Warriors, the Overseer set to the task of seeing off the outcast kindred were soon assassinated by the same hand that delved behind the scenes of this same kindred, the Albin.

This led to the first employ of Viper Assassins in the confrontations of the various kindreds, replacing the Ritual Duel as the foremost way of settling inter-kindred disputes. Rather than being affronted and outraged by this display of impudence, the Overseers of the kindreds were instead intrigued by the advent of this new breed of warriors. Ongkha Nhagar was invited to one of the more important Ritual Duels, but then in exchange for taking the head of the previous Overseer of the Albin. This was summarily done, for the Overseer had outlived his usefulness, all along being simply a handle for the reentry of Ongkha Nhagar back into the workings of the Kroot. Under the same cover of night, Naghor Takhin witnessed the brutal murder of his father. He vowed vengeance against his teacher and master, Ongkha Nhagar, in due time. For the time being, he will take over the place of his father as head of the kindred.

With the removal of Khorwat Naihom from the scene, without his presiding jurisdiction, Ongkha Nhagar decided to seize the opening on a reentry into the larger workings of the Kroot populace. He came before the assembled Overseers at a certain Ritual Duel, promising a more decisive way of handling their affairs. It appeared that in their exile in the Northern Marshes, Ongkha and his Spiriteaters had come into possession of a strange yet great power. And it is this power that the one they call the Hunter now wished to present before them, as he had presented before them so many ages ago. Within the wild marshes of the Northlands, there resided many strange and exotic species of animals, possessing of potent powers. Ongkha named these serpentine creatures, Auropha, or "Venom-flesh". Of these, Ongkha the Hunter saw a prospect since the Exile, and foresaw the formidable and profitable payoff of procuring the precious DNA of these ancient and powerful beasts, that were not to be found anywhere else in Pech. He and his Spiriteaters thus went about a zealous task of digesting as many of these reptilian denizens, that though formidable as they were, were far too primitive in their undeveloped reptilian brains to process the dire threat these Kroot exiles presented to them, and thus were successfully outwitted by downfall of their dimness. Of the beasts possessed and processed, there were three: the Constrictor, the Viper and the Chameleon. Ongkha himself set about the task of obtaining the DNA of as many Chameleons as possible, possessing hidden intentions and purposes for which he kept from the rest of his followers. This

fierce consumption of the shapeshifting Chameleon's flesh, combined with their own unique genetic signature, allowed them to replicate the DNA of what they ate, the ultimate bonding. The Kroot Chameleons could effectively shapeshift their forms into a replica of one of the many DNA they had acquired through genetic absorption. Thus, when Ongkha came before the assembled Overseers of the Kroot kindreds, he came in a different visage, no longer of the same proportion or appearance. He was far evolved ahead of the rest of Kroot kind, except perhaps Khorwat, wherever he was.

The incidence of his coming was to change a lot of the political workings of the Kroot people. Granting them his poisoned assassins, the Vipers, he thus led astray the Kroot Overseers to take to their differences by resolving them with shadow conflicts. An Age of Shadows was at hand. The Kroot Overseers, greedy with the idea of possessing even greater power, succumbed to his offer, even though he came in another guise. The wealthier of the kindreds could employ more Assassins in their conflicts, to assassinate rival Overseers, and thus seal the authority and influence of their kindred. In this way, Ongkha Nhagar came to play the political strife between the kindreds into his hand. This offer was veiled behind a deception of course. The only reason why such a valuable offer was offered in the first place was because Ongkha wished to deplete the resources of the Kroot kindreds, and in their weakened state, seize overall control of the entirety of the Kroot race in the golden absence of Khorwat. At first, these Viper Assassins in employ of the Overseers fought mainly skirmishes against fellow Assassins in the employ of rival Overseers. But this was to change, swiftly. All along, these Shadow Wars were fought in the dark of the night, when the Kroot populace at large was mostly asleep and unaware of the general happenings about them. The Overseers pursued their agendas thus unimpeded, and thought their dark acts would go unnoticed. This was not to be the case, for the secret was leaked out, through unknown means, but we deduced possibly to be by the same agents of Ongkha Nhagar. The Kroot came to be in knowledge of this ruthless dark war waged behind the scenes to govern the shifting of powers among the kindreds and were startled at first, at this discovery. These Assassins came to be greatly feared, for although many wars were fought in the shadows, they were all too willing to bring unwitting Kroot in the vicinity of their clashes into collateral.

The First Age of Strife

Then, the anvil fell. At the command of Ongkha, when he had observed that the leaders of the kindreds were sufficiently depleted, he gave the clarion order to fell their own erstwhile masters. Leading a large army of Constrictors, Vipers and Chameleons from the depths of the Northern Marshes, Ongkha Nhagar, having adopted the title of Shadow Lord, came to advance upon the Kroot-possessed lands in the south. The unsuspecting Kroot populace was sent reeling, and instead of facing off for the protection of their lands, the Warriors in their confusion fled away from the advancing host, southwards. Many were slaughtered and feasted upon ruthlessly by the Shadow Host. Without any true competition faced, with the leaders of the Kroot race either dead or nonplussed, the Shadow Host made its way deep into Kroot territory, shattering any who would oppose their formidable might. At last, the remaining Overseers awakened to their senses and a combined host of the kindreds were formed, and the Warriors, true defenders of the land, were rallied. Assembled in a great pitch battle were the Kroot Keepers with their Kroot Hounds, Kroot Bird Chargers, Krootox Riders and Knarloc Riders, Kroot Warriors with accompanying Kroot Champions, Kroot Hunters who led Kroot Braves, the young and promising Kroot younglings who were yet to be initiated into adulthood, and all of this assembled host were overseen by the remaining Overseers of the kindreds. Together with them were the elite troops of Jaguar Warriors and Eagle Warriors. The Eagle Warriors were flight capable warriors who had consumed plenty of Serapha or "Wing-flesh", thus allowing them to regain the flight capabilities of their ancestors. Jaguar Warriors were the elite select cadre of Warriors, selected from the basis of the ability to hunt and consume the elusive feline predators of the jungles, the Feninpha or "Claw-flesh",

acknowledged as the prime predators of the jungles, being the most agile and swiftest of the hunters of old and equipped with razor-sharp claws and fangs. The elite Champions that fought in the Ritual Duels were selected from this elite cadre of warriors. These warriors were likewise gifted with the speed and grace of the Feninpha, and were truly formidable and a force to be reckoned with.

And thus the two forces met in battle, and a great and vicious fighting broke out. At the side of Ongkha were the Albin. Naghor Takhin knew that despite the strength of the assembled host of the combined armies of the kindreds, too many key leaders were assassinated, and the shifting of powers had not stabilised and thus would likely lead to disagreements in leadership. The forces of Ongkha Nhagar in reverse, were fresh and unsullied, imbued with unfathomable powers, in addition to being thirsty for vengeance. No, if any help were to save all of Kroot kind from falling to the hands of Ongkha Nhagar, it would be the return of the great leader Khorwat Naihoh. For that, Naghor Takhin would make a great gamble, and if all went according to his plan, his vengeance would be twofold, against those who had shunned his father's kindred as outcast, and were ultimately guilty for the death of his father, and for the hand that had slayed him, Ongkha Nhagar himself.

Ongkha Nhagar's Shadow Host was far outnumbered in truth, but the former leader of the combined Kroot kindreds was not to be underestimated. Unbeknown to even his closest associates within the Veiuts, he had single-handedly slayed the Black Tortoise, a fabled creature of immense proportions and even longer longevity, a near immortal. Ongkha had wished to possess the creature's near immortality and renowned defences, likened to being harder than rock and iron. With an increased lifespan, Ongkha could outlive his former enemies within the kindreds, and perhaps even Khorwat Naihoh, and in his long life, oversee the rise of his race far ahead into the millenia. He thus secretly sent spies ahead within the Northern Marshes, to find and discover the location of the Black Tortoise. Surely such a creature would be most conspicuous. It turned out then that most of their searching was fruitless, and indeed perhaps it was merely a creature of legend, no more. But Ongkha Nhagar was not to give up so easily. Using his profound intellect, he deciphered that perhaps the creature did not reside on land, and that the mysterious isle that appeared to move ever so slightly, at a location deep within the Northern Marshes, was more than it appeared to be. With the speed of lightning, Ongkha quickly darted across the water's surface towards the black mass. Once upon the isle, Ongkha raised a razor sharp, poisoned spike protruding from his right forearm and sunk it deep into the ground. The entire isle shook violently as if a pain ruptured through it like it was alive. It was then that Ongkha knew that he was on the Black Tortoise! Needless to say, through the use of poisoned spikes gained from consuming the Auropha, Ongkha Nhagar got his way once again. Once in possession of the DNA of the Black Tortoise, Ongkha knew there was no stopping him...except perhaps for the gift of flight...

Almost as if conjuring a great illusion before the assembled hosts, Ongkha Nhagar shapeshifted into the form of the Black Tortoise, a towering reptilian of immense proportions. Trampling all underfoot, the great form of Ongkha Nhagar crushed those foolish to stand before him. Every Hunting Spear thrown was only to bounce harmlessly off the mightily tough shell of the Black Tortoise. With no true unified leadership, and with Ongkha himself leading the fray, it wasn't anywhere near evenly matched. Using the commotion of the battle, Naghor Takhin led his kindred, the Albin, upwards south, towards Giganmalok, in the hope of contacting the great Khorwat Naihoh. Meanwhile, Ongkha Nhagar's Shadow Host had successfully scattered the remaining warhost of the Kroot kindreds, and were in the process of hunting the remnants down as they fled up south. Changing into a quicker and subtler form, Ongkha Nhagar continued the pursuit, a vicious and merciless manhunt. Spearheading his advance up south, Ongkha encountered little resistance as the forces of the Kroot kindreds, without any perceivable head or leadership, were in full retreat. Ongkha Nhagar, seeing imminent victory at hand, led his forces up towards Giganmalok, pursuing and cutting down any stray retreating Kroot forces at the same time. This was not without ulterior

motivation of course; with the impetus of the war, Ongkha hoped to find Khorwat who had banished him and feasted on the formidable warrior's flesh, thus adding his own inestimable DNA imprint into his. He did hope for one thing, that Khorwat would be successful in whatever endeavour he had set upon himself, so that his flesh was all the more desirable and valuable to eat. To gain the power of the dragons themselves...the power of fire and flight; it was the mantle of the Gods! It shall be his...in time to come.

As the Shadow Host lurched upwards Giganmalok, a strange incident occurred. All of a sudden, the vanguard was met with resistance, in the form of winged, fanged beasts that overcasted the ground with their shadows and descended on them in a fury of talons and fangs. In a matter of moments, these great winged beasts had waded their way through into the middle of the Shadow Host's ranks, slaughtering with sheer brute strength all resistance. The Viper Assassins proved little match, outmanoeuvred by the swift wings of these unknown assailants. But of course, Ongkha understood easily that it is none other than an encounter with the lost Great Hunt. All that was left was to acquire their flesh, which proved harder than thought. The "dragons" stayed out of harm's reach, only darting ever so often in to deliver a fatal stroke with their claws. Ongkha knew that the Black Tortoise form would be too slow and unwieldy to match the speed and swiftness of the dragons, so he took to spitting poison instead, and where possible, shooting venomous spikes. With his unmatched hunting skill that made him renowned in the first place, he brought down a single dragon, and proceeded to gorge on his flesh. The dragons continued their terrorisation of the Shadow Host, harrying them from the skies with unmatched fighting skill. In their clashing, much had been lost by the Shadow Host, while the dragons of the Great Hunt remained relatively unscathed. Then, slowly it happened. Wings started to sprout from the back of Ongkha Nhangar, his accelerated genetic hunger processing the DNA of the consumed foe at burning speeds. At last, he arose, born anew on wings of sinew and talon. Flying into the skies with a cry of sheer triumph, he tore into the unsuspecting "dragons", and scattered them. Then he made to breathe...but nothing happened. What was this?! Impossible! But then it had appeared curious to him why those who had gained the power of the dragons in the Great Hunt had not used the power of flame, the breath of Rakui. It was none other than because they did not have it!

Shocked and momentarily stunned, Ongkha was knocked sprawling to the ground far below. Undaunted, he picked himself up. It might be the case that he had not the possession of fire, of the Gods, but he still had flight. One thing, with great tenacity, will be acquired at a time. Perhaps Khorwat had been the sole person to gain that final, ultimate power. It was time to do battle, and so thinking thus, he soared into the arena of the skies and devoured in midair as many of the "wyverns" as he could. Then, he came. Wrapped in flames, he appeared in the sky's horizon, a gigantic figure, monstrously winged, and breathing flame and fire. A true dragon; Khorwat Naihom had succeeded after all. "This will be the end, Ongkha." Khorwat drawled. Dashing with the fury of an erupting volcano, Khorwat and his Elders of the Great Hunt, who whom like him had gained not only the power of flight, but of fire, sought to do all in their means to bring Ongkha to justice. It appears up along the slopes of Giganmalok, there existed indeed the mighty "Rakuipha", only that their power appeared far too great for even the Kroot at their evolutionary apex to handle. Their young however, were relatively weak, but could only fly and not breathe fire. So in this way, Khorwat had sought to eat as many of their young as possible to gain the power of flight, to a point where they could fight the dragons on equal footing; to challenge the might of the Gods themselves. Having succeeded, Khorwat and his closest and most capable associates, became blessed with the power of the Gods. And now, that very same power will be used to visit on Ongkha the Traitor. The Viper Assassins under Ongkha Nhangar's tutelage are cunning adversaries, having merged the minds of the cold, calculating reptilians with their own. Thus, they sought every opportunity to consume the dead wyverns instead of fighting whenever the opportunity presented itself, and thus some of them had already sprouted wings. They quickly joined Ongkha in the air. Now, outgunned by the rage of inferno of Khorwat's power of the Rakui, what could Ongkha hoped to do, to triumph

against such a power? It might seem the battle was decided beforehand.

So now a battle between the leaders of Kroot culture, clashed once more, for the sake and determination of the future of Kroot civilisation. Khorwat was first to act; breathing deep, he unleashed an all-consuming breath of fire, aimed right at Ongkha. Ongkha made to evade, flapping his wings in haste, careening to the side. In retaliation, Ongkha responded with a weapon of range of his own, spitting out a gob of poison at Khorwat. Understanding instinctively the deadliness of the assault, Khorwat reacted likewise, manoeuvring away from the poisonous spit, with fleet wings in mid-flight. A deadly aerial dance was fought, a battle of wings, talons, flame and poison. Soaring in on great beating wings, Khorwat rushed Ongkha in midair, bringing him down crashing to the ground. There they wrestled viciously, talons raking and digging into flesh on both sides. The main motive of Khorwat's action however, was to tie Ongkha in a position where he could not escape his fire breath at close range, and be forced to a burnt crisp, ultimately till death. Realising the aim of Khorwat, Ongkha in desperation, decided to use their proximity to lob out a poison spit right in his face. The poison burnt into Khorwat's skin like acid, causing him to reel back in pain. Seizing this momentary victory, Ongkha broke free and dashed into the skies, turning back around for a further attack once more. Knowing the poison will enter Khorwat's nervous system, and momentarily paralyse him into shock, Ongkha became confident, waiting for Khorwat to exert himself, and make his move, all in order for him to falter and create an opening for which Ongkha can then end the fight. But Khorwat was smart, as he was brave. Instead of moving and allowing his system to go into shock, he opened his maw and generated a ball of concentrated fire there, a power that can be considered akin to a solar flare. This Flare had the power to utterly destroy anything it made contact with, and all he needed was a space of a few seconds to unleash it. Breathing in deep, he sent the Great Flare firing right at the heart of Ongkha, and Ongkha in his smugness, was not ready to anticipate the attack, and only managed to escape the shot from completely obliterating him, with half of his body damaged and scathed by the overwhelming firepower of the Flare.

The battle was a stalemate. Here, Ongkha was effectively incapacitated, while Khorwat had poison running through his veins. None could claim the victor, for none could move on for the finishing blow. Khorwat was the first to act, speaking out in his vehemence for this treacherous act, that has only wasted countless precious lives, all for the sake of some sickening ambition, that is no doubt the want of power. "What will you do if you have won? Was it worth it to sacrifice so many Kroot lives? Just for the sake of your ambitions? Is death really a good trade for your sole life?"

"What is your justification for all of this? For the control of our race, no doubt. Was it worth it at all?!"

Ongkha Nhagar understood his volatility, for his heatedness. He had sacrificed so many Kroot lives in his blindness for power, but for that power to steer the course of their great race to the success of evolution. Is there not nobility in that? He spoke thus, "All I wanted is for power, yes, but for the power to guide our race's evolutionary path, for the strengthening of our people. Is there not nobility in that, if blood is to be shed, for there ultimately to be a great peace of almost certain utopia? With our race's evolution reaching its apex, there will be none to oppose us, and we shall be the dominant force in existence, and who knows, that of other worlds as well. We must see to it, that we learn and acquire as much as possible, and discover the secrets within and without us, for the preservation of our race!"

It was decided; the ideas of this age were to be determined by tooth, nail and claw. They took to the skies in midair, wrestling, an aerial ballet both breathtaking and deadly, a decisive end to a long-drawn out battle between two powers. The one who was to come out on top would be the one to lead our race in this new epoch. But it seems the two powers were evenly matched: none could get the better of the other. It appears an external determinant was required, to shift the balance of

powers, in favour, and in hopes, for the greater good of their race.

And the one to come with that was none other than the Tactician himself, Naghor Takhin, who decisively seized this opened opportunity to strike together with the great Khorwat, and bring down the one who took the life of his father, and thus gain vengeance. Upon his appearance, Khorwat was pinning down Ongkha, with his great wings enveloping him. Ongkha breathed his relief, under the belief that Naghor has come to his aid. Now the tables will be turned in his favour, seeing Naghor lifting his Hunting Spear, taking aim at both figures. But the words escaped Naghor, words Ongkha will never want to hear. "Just like how it all began with the tenets of the Hunter's Code, so shall it end with it, a single stroke, dealing death at the jugular." With that, he threw the Spear at the exposed head of Ongkha, slaying and felling him in one blow.

And so ended the First Great War, the First Age of Strife.