Within a year, every tribe was paying tribute to the Jakkiolenna. Each begrudged the levy but had their own survival to think of; they could not spare any hunters for war. Nor could they deviate from the path of the herds. They felt that they had no option.

As is the manner of children, the youth were less practical and more given to passion. One night, the children of the Sekkiolummi, aged eight to fifteen, gathered in the tent of Illakkes. Illakkes—a fifteen-year-old priestess-in-training—followed Illa, goddess of the dark, earth and owl. Illa was quite displeased; meat intended for sacrifice to her birds was being given to the Jakkiolenna instead, and Illa had grown lean.

“Oh Illa, how can we break from this tyranny?” Illakkes asked her patron, while the rest of the youth watched on.

Illa possessed a boy of nine and answered in a pre-pubescent voice: “Fire is the refuge of cowards and tyrants, but the bold may walk under the moon.”

And thus were the Illawen—the dark-helpers—born. When their parents packed carts of taxed meat to deliver to their governors, the Illawen stole much of it for themselves. Winter was coming, and the tribes were headed south to the woods where the reindeer grazed until spring. The Illawen planned to shadow the Jakkiolenna as they traveled.

Before they left, Illakkes went to the tent of her mentor. While the high priestess slept, her student crept upon her, bone dagger in hand. The older woman’s eyes shot open and saw for the last time.

Illakkes spoke: “You ought not have allowed this.”

The journey was a dangerous one for the children. They had little to eat and only their passion for warmth, but the moon cast light on them and they never wavered from their path.

The notion was a dangerous one for the children. They had little protection from the cold. The embers, instead, held the warmth that kept them alive. They could not afford to lose the heat of the Jakkiolenna, and this was a task they were assigned to perform. The Jakkiolenna were on their trail, and the children knew it. They were not alone.

Grown men. The plans remained unchanged.

In the woods where the reindeer grazed, the Jakkiolenna were hollowed out of hollow trees. Winter was coming, and the Jakkiolenna went south in search of it. Their numbers were much reduced since the Jakkiolenna, Jakkiolenna were released from the jaws of death, and the Jakkiolenna were free to roam the land. The Jakkiolenna, under the guidance of their young leader, Izik, set out to find the children of the Jakkiolenna. They were not alone.

The children were young, but they had their own plan. They knew that the Jakkiolenna were on their trail, and they were not about to let the Jakkiolenna catch them. They had a plan.

As the ember-bearer walked past a cliff, an elder girl from among the Illawen cast a spear into his leg with her atlatl. The Jakkiolenna hunters set out at once to find the antagonist, but the girl hid in the recess of a tree too small for a full-grown man to enter. She watched as the Jakkiolenna passed by, their breaths frozen in the air. The Jakkiolenna were not aware of the girl, and the children knew that they had won.

But the Jakkiolenna were not finished. They would come for them again, and this time they would be ready. The Illawen had learned their lesson, and they were ready to face the Jakkiolenna once more. The journey was not over, but the children knew that they had a chance. They would not give up.
ast herds of reindeer migrated across the tundra of the north, and the tribes migrated with them. It was a time before settlement, a time before animal husbandry and it was a time before nations.

The tribes would skirmish whenever two converged on one herd by accident, but the results were far from disastrous. Most often, the weaker tribe conceded without a fight, though sometimes they would raise the banners of war. On these rare instances, the larger tribe usually left rather than face such a risk to their people. Occasionally, neither side backed down and many, usually brash young hunters, would be injured or killed.

Prisoners were incorporated into the victorious tribe, a practice that kept the bloodlines diverse and strong.

This had been going on since the time before time. And, of course, one tribe almost ruined it for everyone.

The Jakkiolenna were the most powerful tribe in all their frozen world, and so sure were they of their power that they eventually refused to

Jakkiolella's guard as he crept into their camp. His body was taken to the priestess of Iksi, who stripped his clothes and revealed his chest. A black sun was tattooed on his sternum, a perfect circle surrounded by eight triangular rays.

"Illa," she said, "this boy serves Illa. Tonight we sacrifice an owl."

But the attacks did not relent, for a god's power is not found only in symbols.

When the Jakkiolenna reached the winter woods, the Sekkiolummi, their only allies, were nowhere to be found. The other tribes, temporarily united, struck them down. The few imperial survivors were distributed amongst the coalition and the Jakkiolenna were no more.

“What of our people,” one young Illawen asked of Illakkes upon her return, “what of the Sekkiolummi?”

“The gods direct us,” she replied, “and when we don’t listen, we are lost. Our parents are lost, and we shall seek them.”

The Illawen set out north, toward the sea, to search for their parents. Led by a young woman on the back of a dark gray reindeer, they were never heard from again. Some say they died, of course, and others say they didn’t.