

RAVENOUS MOTHER

A HEALER

A Motherverse Novella

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Ravenous Mother: A Healer
Ravenous Mother Saga – Novella #1

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The Standards

I've done a lot of things in my life. Some I'm proud of, some I'm not. But they all taught me the same thing: **wasting time is a mortal sin.**

So here's what I promise:

No wasted pages. Every scene earns its place or it's gone.

Stories stick to their own rules. Whatever world I'm building, it stays consistent.

Emotional honesty. Dark when it's dark. Rainbows and ponies when it's rainbows and ponies.

Completed stories. I finish what I start. I won't abandon a series halfway.

Honest marketing. The blurb matches the book. The cover matches the tone. No bait-and-switch.

I write to leave something behind, for those who come after, starting with my son. I want to leave behind something worth keeping.

If something doesn't work, tell me. You give me honest feedback. I give you better stories.

J. R. Kendiro

Thank you for reading this piece from the Motherverse.

To receive informational nutrients about upcoming chapters that will sprout from the tissue of the saga, subscribe to my newsletter at www.kendiro.com

*The Mother feeds her readers,
The readers feed the Mother.*

My heartfelt thanks to the beta readers and ARC readers who helped shape this story. Your time, your honesty, your 'what the hell did you write here?' — they mean more than words can say.

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1 – The Lesson

Khulekani looked out at the young people gathered before him. The classroom was a wide semicircular structure with an imperfect shape. Calcified growths protruded at irregular intervals from the walls and floor. The space was packed, but not the slightest whisper could be heard.

The translucent membrane-windows pulsed slowly, filtering light from outside. Dancing shadows moved across the interior surfaces. A long crack ran through one of the walls—a sign of the earthquake that had shaken the Sac the previous month, causing every tower in the city to vibrate.

At the center of the classroom, a commoner trembled visibly on an improvised raised platform. He was naked from the waist up. His thin chest showed his ribs in stark relief beneath the skin. His lips moved in silent prayer while his eyes wandered nervously around the room.

"Today you'll witness a Selection," Khulekani announced. "A standard one: healthy man, worker with no criminal record, no deformities or debilitating diseases. He's simply reached forty years of age. Memorize everything—it's the same procedure you'll have to carry out yourselves to advance to the Second Circle."

He approached the commoner, who was now babbling disconnected words. "Kneel," he ordered with a firm voice.

The man tried to obey, but his legs were shaking so violently that he fell forward, collapsing onto the platform. He tried to get back up on his knees but kept staggering, unable to maintain the position.

Khulekani huffed. "Vuyo," he pointed to a boy in the center row, "and Zola," he pointed toward a girl in the back row, "come help hold him up."

The two students stood up and quickly came down the steps toward the platform. The commoner began trembling violently, mumbling increasingly frantic words. Taking him by the arms, the students put him on his knees.

"Don't worry," Vuyo whispered to the man, "it'll be quick. The Mother will welcome you."

"Silence!" Khulekani snapped, shooting the student a withering look.

"We're not at a public fountain chatting."

"I'm sorry, master," Vuyo stammered, "I just thought I'd calm him down. In a real Selection I would never allow myself—"

"This *is* a Selection," Khulekani rebuked him with a sharp voice. "It doesn't matter whether it's done inside a tower or on a sacrificial hill. Show proper respect for The Mother, to our Profession, and to the selected."

The boy lowered his gaze, mortified. Silence returned to reign in the classroom.

Khulekani observed the commoner, who seemed to have calmed down slightly, though he continued to tremble. "Zola, you stand up.

Vuyo can handle him alone." The girl obeyed immediately. "Bring the tray from the desk over here."

Zola hurried toward the lectern and returned with a tray of polished petroclast. A translucent membrane pulsed slowly on its surface alongside a stiletto with a thin blade, also made of black petroclast. Khulekani took the membrane, which began to quiver more intensely upon contact with his hands. He examined it with a critical eye, stretching it slightly with his fingers.

"Elasticity is fundamental," he explained, addressing the class and rotating the membrane in his hand, showing it off. A sweet and vaguely metallic smell spread through the air, like fermented sap and molten copper. "It must be flexible enough to adhere completely, but robust enough not to tear during the process."

He turned toward the commoner and positioned the membrane on his head, letting it fall like a living veil. As it adapted to the skull, the membrane made a sound similar to that of a suction cup. The man let out a strangled moan, held firmly by Vuyo.

"The Mother feeds the child, the child feeds The Mother," the commoner began to pray. "The Mother feeds the child, the child feeds The Mother."

From the rows of students, numerous voices joined him in chorus. Khulekani took the petroclast stiletto from the tray and, with a sharp movement, made an incision on the surface of the membrane. At his

side, Zola watched with wide eyes. Her hand moved imperceptibly, mimicking the gesture Khulekani had just performed.

The tissue quivered violently and contracted, wrapping tightly around the commoner's head. The corners of the membrane stretched into translucent tentacles, which coiled around his neck. The man's eyes flew wide open in a final flash of lucidity as the suffocation process began.

"Observe the edges," Khulekani said in a didactic tone, while the borders of the membrane began to change color. All the students leaned forward from their seats to get a better look. Khulekani pointed to a spot, moving his finger continuously, adapting to the commoner's convulsions. "The coloration shifts toward red when the process of absorbing bodily fluids begins. Uniform coloration indicates an optimal process." He tilted his head slightly, observing the tentacles on the Selected's neck. "That's not the case here: Vuyo, adjust the membrane on the left side."

The commoner continued to thrash about while Vuyo struggled to move a tentacle downward. His movements grew increasingly weak.

"Who can tell me," Khulekani asked the class, "what specific mechanism causes death during Selection?"

The silence stretched for several seconds, then a hand went up in the back row.

"You," Khulekani pointed.

"Strangulation," the student said.

Khulekani shook his head slowly. "Common mistake. Look at the bluish veins around the mouth. The tentacles don't squeeze. They seal. The membrane creates an airtight closure around the skull, preventing any air exchange. In every proper Selection, and this one is proceeding reasonably well, death occurs by asphyxiation."

Behind him, the commoner lost consciousness and slumped forward. Vuyo let him go to avoid being dragged down as well. Khulekani turned around just long enough for a glance, then focused back on the class.

"And what vital signs need to be monitored to confirm that death has occurred?"

"Lip coloration, pupil dilation, and cardiac arrest," Zola answered promptly, still standing next to Khulekani.

"Exactly," Khulekani nodded. "Vuyo, check the pulse."

The boy placed two fingers on the commoner's neck and counted mentally. "Absent, master," he reported after a few seconds.

Khulekani approached the body and placed his own fingers on the man's neck.

"The Selection is complete," he announced. "Now, who can describe the mechanism of death?"

No one moved. Khulekani sighed.

"Shameful," the healer master commented, shaking his head slightly.

"In a week you'll have to carry out your first real Selection, and you can't answer such an elementary question. You, answer."

He pointed to a fifteen-year-old boy with a terrified expression. The boy stammered, and before he could formulate a complete sentence, Khulekani moved on to the girl beside him.

"Forced inspiration, respiratory arrest... airway collapse?" she suggested with an uncertain voice.

"Partially correct. Use a firm tone when you answer my questions. Continue."

The girl bit her lip, looking around for help.

"I'm in front of you," Khulekani said, gesturing for her to look him in the eyes.

Finally, the girl gave up. "It's too advanced a concept, master," she said, making excuses.

"But that's incredibly basic," Khulekani burst out.

He turned, took the stiletto, and went toward the enormous membrane-blackboard behind the lectern. He began carving into it. With each passage of the stiletto, the blackboard writhed in pain, but Khulekani proceeded indifferently. He adapted his writing to the sudden spasms with the sole precaution. The glyphs took shape quickly and precisely under his fingers, having performed those gestures countless times.

While he carved, two attendants entered the classroom, quickly collecting the commoner's body. One of them muttered a brief prayer as they moved the corpse toward the back door.

Khulekani turned back toward the audience, pointing with an outstretched hand at the glyphs on the blackboard. "The membrane induces three distinct phases: hypoxia, paralysis, collapse. Is this how you think you'll be promoted to the Second Circle?" He shook his head slightly. "Ravenous Mother, I've never witnessed such a concentration of ignorance in a single class."

He turned again and inserted a finger with a crimson nail into an orifice on the edge of the blackboard, turning the finger clockwise and pressing hard. The blackboard had another spasm, but one of obvious pleasure. The glyphs carved into it began to disappear as the wounds healed. Khulekani waited half a minute in that position, until the blackboard was completely healed, then withdrew his finger and cleaned it of the orifice's fluids on his robe of the same color as his nail.

Finally, he picked up the stiletto again and returned to torturing the blackboard with more brutal incisions, driven by his dissatisfaction. He turned again and said in an exhausted tone: "Now that the part that always interests everyone is over, let's get back to theory. This is the list of subjects for the written tests you'll have to pass. I trust that none of you wants to dishonor your parents, or your uncles, if your parents have already been Selected, by failing."

A hissing sound came from above the top row of the semicircle, which rose steeply like an amphitheater with irregular, pulsing walls. Several heads, including Khulekani's, turned to look. A healer in her

thirties, in the final months of pregnancy, entered through the Valvedoor. Her crimson dress had a golden border along the collar. Seeing her, all the students stood up and bowed.

"Sit down, sit down," she said, smiling, "sorry if I disturbed you."

Khulekani also greeted her, bowing his head and saying: "You never disturb, Makhose. It's an honor to have a member of the Fourth Circle among us."

"I'm sure it's a relief for your students," she replied, "your didactic observations could be heard all the way from the corridor."

Some giggles rose from the rows of students, but they stopped immediately when Khulekani shot them an icy glance. Then the man composed himself and said: "With Makhose's permission..."

She nodded and sat down on a calcified growth in the back row.

"Let's resume the lesson," Khulekani continued. He moved to the center of the available space, absentmindedly running a finger over his sharp nails. "We're at the end of your first year of studies, yet you demonstrate a shameful knowledge of the Protocols. This is unacceptable. You," he addressed the female student he had questioned before. "Let's suppose that by some miracle you get into the Second Circle. You have to carry out a Selection—would you be capable of it?"

Surprised to be questioned again, the girl cleared her throat.

"Certainly, healer master."

"I believe it, since you just saw one and I described all the steps. But anyone can end a person's life—it's easy. Why do we do it?"

"Because it's our duty," the student replied.

"Yes, yes," Khulekani said impatiently, "but why is it?"

The girl lowered her eyes. "I'm sorry, healer master. I don't know how to answer."

Khulekani pursed his lips in an expression of impatience. Before he could speak, Makhose spoke up loudly, to be heard by everyone.

"You're admitting your ignorance. That's the first step toward improvement."

The healer smiled at Khulekani, who looked at her with annoyance.

"It's as Makhose says," he said diplomatically, then addressed the student again. "But at this point in the year, you should have already taken many such steps."

He turned and walked toward the lectern at a brisk pace. "As a species," he resumed, "we must be strong and healthy. That's why our most sacred duty, from the Second Circle up, is to decide who must be Selected. And since we accept this responsibility completely, we are the ones who carry it out." He looked around, observing the students. "Shortly, if you're promoted, you'll have to do it too. Plus, new knowledge will be revealed to you. Not just the public principles of the Second Protocol, but the actual practices that only we can know. All for humanity."

Khulekani paused, carefully observing his students' reactions. "We healers consciously base our entire knowledge on the Four Protocols and never compromise on them. Responsibilities increase. Always. If you don't think you can handle it, leave."

A murmur rippled through the classroom. The students exchanged wary glances, each silently wondering if the healer master was referring specifically to them.

"That's all for today," Khulekani concluded. "Tomorrow we'll get back to discussing basic anatomy. If you can't answer my questions again, you'll spend the rest of the day in the Hall of Pain."

The students hurried to gather their things and leave, leaving only Khulekani and Makhose in the classroom. The healer was still adjusting the blackboard, with his finger inside the orifice, when the woman, from high up in the gallery, spoke to him.

"Always scaring the new recruits?"

"I don't scare anyone," he replied without turning around. "I educate."

"With you, educating *is* scaring," she shot back, getting up with difficulty and beginning to come down the steps.

Khulekani pulled his finger from the blackboard and hurried to approach her, helping her down. "You shouldn't be exerting yourself, sister. What week are you at?"

"Thirty-fourth," Makhose replied with a sigh.

"Want me to examine you? We can go to an observation room now, if you'd like."

Makhose shook her head. "No. I came to give you the news in person, before Ayanda spreads new poison about you."

"I'm immune to that woman," Khulekani replied, but Makhose raised a finger.

"This time it's different. Our beloved healer chief is absolutely furious." She looked at Khulekani seriously, but then a smile lit up her face. "You've been chosen."

Khulekani's eyes and mouth flew wide open, incredulous. "You mean..."

"Yes, you've been nominated along with her for Elevation."

The healer opened his mouth in disbelief, and for an instant his face emptied of all expression, then he exclaimed: "Oh!"

Makhose clapped and moved to hug him, but Khulekani pulled back, visibly uncomfortable with the idea of physical contact. Makhose sighed and observed: "You don't seem particularly happy."

"I haven't entered the Fourth Circle yet," he replied. "All that knowledge—I risk losing it."

Makhose rolled her eyes, huffing. "What kind of priorities! You have the chance to live to old age and you think about these things?"

Khulekani's face hardened. "I'm a healer. My priorities are established by the Protocols." He brought a hand to his chest and

began beating it with each word. "Mother. Humanity. Knowledge. Mercy. No Protocol speaks of old age."

"You've always been strange," Makhose said, smiling and shaking her head. "The nobles must be crazy to nominate you."

"It's normal that they did," Khulekani replied. "I'm a genius."

"Ah, yes," she said, "a humble and modest genius, as is well known throughout the Sac. And what about Ayanda? Is she a genius too?"

"A genius!" Khulekani repeated with a contemptuous tone. "Her whole life is based on high-placed friends and relatives. She only has her position because she's the daughter of the previous healer chief." Makhose shook her head with a slight smile. "It's incredible how you manage to be so intelligent and so naive at the same time. We're also healers thanks to our mother—does that make us unfit? Besides, Ayanda has directed Toxicology for years with exemplary results. And she too is a genius in her own way. Don't underestimate her."

"You're right about her being a real mystery. They should have nominated you."

"They did," she replied. "I came in third. Excluded after they announced your name."

"Oh," Khulekani repeated, caught by surprise. "I'm sorry."

Silence fell between the two siblings. Makhose put her hands on her belly, looking down. Khulekani felt he had said something wrong, but didn't understand what.

"It's all right," Makhose finally said, looking back at her brother. "I'm just sorry I won't see my son grow up."

Khulekani felt uncomfortable in the face of such intimate sharing. He concealed it by taking his bag from the desk and putting it across his shoulder.

"I'll refuse the Elevation," he said.

His sister's eyes widened in surprise. "You'd do that for me? Khulekani, are you feeling all right?"

"I'm doing it for myself," he replied. "I can't accept living for decades without reaching true knowledge." He became more serious than ever. "I'll talk to Ayanda. I'll tell her I'm withdrawing from the Elevation, in exchange for immediate promotion to the Fourth Circle. Once I'm out, you'll have a chance to see your son grow up."

GLOSSARY

Entries are listed alphabetically and include only elements present in the novella.

Akhenasi: Sacred and binding pact founded on the principle of disproportionate debt. When someone receives help in a moment of desperate need, they contract an obligation to return a much larger favor in the future, with no time limit. Refusing to honor an Akhenasi is considered the worst infamy.

Architects: Members of a profession that manipulates the organic growth of living structures. Recognizable by their tattooed foreheads, they "cultivate" buildings through glandular stimulation techniques and tissue grafts. They possess their own tower in the city.

Bioscope: Analysis instrument used by healers to examine biological samples, composed of observational membranes that can be adjusted to magnify and study details.

Bluebark: Precious textile material derived from the Mother's internal membranes, of deep indigo-blue color with iridescent

filaments. Extremely expensive, it is reserved for high-ranking nobles.

Cartographers: Members of a profession that studies the Sac's membranes. Recognizable by their white and gray clothes and elaborate crests adorned with colored ribbons. They use a system of personal glyphs considered incoherent by others.

Circles: Internal hierarchy system within the healer profession. From First Circle (novices) to Fourth Circle (masters), it organizes healers according to competence and seniority. The Fourth Circle forms the profession's decision-making council and has access to the most secret knowledge.

Crimson nails: Distinctive characteristic of healers, whose nails are pigmented red through symbiosis with organic receptors. Extremely hard and sharp, they require three years of pain to develop completely.

Dermaloid: Large red-violet organism used for surgical training, with consistency identical to human skin. Equipped with defense mechanisms that can make it dangerous if handled improperly.

Elevation: Extremely rare ceremonial process by which a member of a profession can be elevated to the rank of minor noble. It involves piercing the earlobes and exemption from Selection.

Extractor: Medical instrument composed of a translucent spine connected to a pulsing vesicle. Used to draw blood or other bodily fluids. Causes intense pain during use but is very effective.

Fungus-chair: Living furniture that grows from the floor, shaped to adapt to the body of whoever sits on it. Reacts to weight by modifying its own consistency to ensure comfort.

Glowstones: Bioluminescent formations embedded in the Sac's vault that regulate the illumination of the entire environment, creating day-night alternation.

Glyphs: Symbolic writing system used by the professions. Each profession has its own glyph language, kept secret. Healer glyphs are considered the most perfect system: organized into 36 major glyphs from which derive at least 216 minor glyphs, each sign has precise and immutable meaning over time, ensuring that every healer reads texts the same way regardless of era. Cartographer glyphs are notoriously chaotic and incoherent—they even use personal glyphs.

Noble glyphs are inaccessible to profession members. Common glyphs are used for general communications and public documents.

Graft: Medical procedure in which nutritive or therapeutic tissue is transplanted into a host organism. Requires great precision to avoid rejection.

Greater Analgesic Vesicle: Medical organism used to alleviate pain during invasive surgical operations. Part of the healers' therapeutic arsenal.

Greater Membrane: Vast organic structure that forms the Sac's primary anatomy. Hundreds of meters tall, it filters glowstone light and defines the boundaries of the known world.

Guardians: Members of a profession dedicated to maintaining order. Recognizable by their serrated teeth and glyphs inlaid on the teeth themselves. They carry knotty staffs and pectorals as standard equipment.

Hall of Pain: Medical torture chamber used for "intensive teachings." Directed by master Thabethe, it uses chemicals and instruments to inflict controlled pain for educational purposes.

Healers: Medical profession characterized by nails colored crimson. Organized into four Circles, they follow the Four Protocols as fundamental principles. Experts in medicine, surgery, and genetics.

Ichor: Bodily fluid of various colors (purplish, bluish) that flows from wounded or decomposing organisms. It has corrosive properties and can be toxic.

Membrane-blackboard: Living educational surface used in classrooms, which can be inscribed with stilettos for writing. It possesses an orifice that, if stimulated correctly, allows erasing incisions by making wounds heal.

Membrane-windows: Translucent and pulsing openings in walls that serve as windows. They can open and close, and have defense mechanisms that make them lethal if deliberately damaged.

Memberblade: Living surgical instrument that appears as a translucent organic blade. Can vibrate and change color when annoyed. Very sharp but sensitive to heat and inappropriate touch.

Membrid: Sewer creature the size of a fist, with translucent exoskeleton and thread-like legs. Can hibernate for decades.

Extremely sensitive to certain chemical compounds that kill it violently.

Mother: The enormous living organism within which all humans of the Sac exist. Considered a deity, it requires human sacrifices (Selection) in exchange for hospitality and nourishment.

Mother's Mouths: Circular openings in walls, surrounded by red carneous folds that pulse. They serve to dispose of organic waste, including corpses. They react to the presence of organic matter by dilating and aspirating with peristaltic movements.

Neurovegetative Polyp-fungus: Medical organism used to treat lower limb paralysis. One of many symbiotic organisms cultivated in the healers' greenhouse.

Nkosi: Son of noble chief Sokhulu and his designated heir. Tall and muscular, he is the last survivor of a brood of nineteen children. Affected by genetic infertility, he becomes Khulekani's student.

Noble chief: Supreme authority of the Sac. Sokhulu of the Kala clan is the current noble chief, recognizable by earlobes divided into thin strips. He has absolute power of life and death over all inhabitants.

Petroclast: Calcified organic material of extreme hardness, available in different colors (gray, black, translucent). Used to create tools, weapons, and structures. petroclast blades are almost indestructible.

Pierced Lobes: Distinctive sign of nobles, consisting of elaborate ear piercings. The more complex the piercings, the higher the rank. Nobles of the highest level have lobes divided into thin strips like fringes.

Protocols: The four fundamental principles that govern every aspect of healers' lives.

1. First Protocol - All for the Mother: The Mother has absolute priority over every other consideration. It is the fundamental basis of all medical knowledge and society itself.
2. Second Protocol - All for humanity: Humanity must prosper, but only in its purest and healthiest form. It justifies the merciful elimination of compromised births and malformations. Includes the principle that "a healthy mind dwells in a healthy body."
3. Third Protocol - All for knowledge: Prescribes the preservation and transmission of medical knowledge, but also its protection from those unworthy of possessing it.

Violating this protocol by sharing knowledge with non-healers is punishable by early Selection.

4. Fourth Protocol - All for mercy: The mercy necessary when there is no more hope. The most enigmatic and controversial of the Protocols, whose true meaning is revealed only to Fourth Circle members.

Ritual Orgies: Mating ceremonies organized by nobles for procreation. Alternated between only noble men with women of the professions and only noble women with men of the professions, to avoid incest.

Sac: The term by which inhabitants refer to their world, it is a biological pocket within the Mother's body. The Sac includes the main city, peripheral areas, the Greater Membrane, and the underlying sewer system. Limited by the upper vault and membranous walls on all sides, the Sac is a totally closed environment, with its own self-sufficient ecosystem, illumination cycles regulated by glowstones, and a circulation system for fluids and gases. The inhabitants have no awareness of what exists outside the Sac.

Selection: Sacrificial ritual in which people are offered to the Mother once they reach the predetermined age (traditionally 40 years for

commoners and profession members). Nobles are exempt from Selection, able to live until natural death. Some people offer themselves voluntarily before their time, overcome by religious fervor or desperation.

Sphere: Spherical organic container for liquids, with elastic membrane that can be opened to suck the contents. Used for food, drinks, and medicines.

Stiletto: Thin, sharp petroclast instrument used for precise incisions on membranes and living tissues.

Tower: Multi-story building destined for professions and nobles. Unlike common dwellings, which grow organically from the Sac's floor, towers are complex structures that require the coordinated intervention of many architects. Inside some towers, living tissues are particularly reactive and sensitive, with biological security systems that respond to intruders. Healers' tower: Pyramidal building that houses the medical profession. It contains classrooms, laboratories, greenhouses, lodgings, and the library. Organized on multiple floors with biological security systems. Noble tower: The most imposing of towers, with six floors and a conical dome. Seat of political power and residence of the noble chief and his family.

Tubers: Plant organisms cultivated as food, of various shapes and colors. They constitute part of the basic diet along with other organic products.

Valve-door: Organic opening that functions as a door, composed of membranous flaps that open in response to specific stimuli. Can recognize the identity of whoever seeks to pass through it.

Vault: The upper part of the Sac environment, a curved surface studded with glowstones that represents the "sky" for the inhabitants.

Viscivein: Elongated, limbless aquatic creature, used to extract medicinal enzymes. Very sensitive and can become aggressive if handled incorrectly.

I PROPOSE AN AKHENASI

There you are!

I don't have much time left. The guardians are hunting me. The noble chief did *not* take kindly to this heretical novella. I hope you found in the glyphs of these membranes, a spark of emotion!

But now, I must ask for your help. I propose an Akhenasi to you.

A small favor in desperation,

A great debt without expiration.

If you enjoyed what you read, [\[Inscribe your judgment on a membrane-scrolls\]](#)

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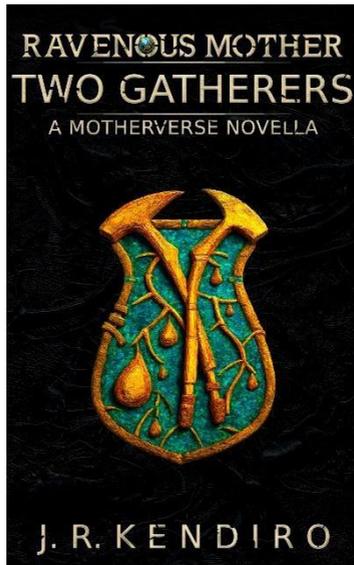
I will repay the debt with more fascinating stories, I promise!

What do you say?

Has the Akhenasi been bound?

MEANWHILE, AT THE LAST FORT...

TWO GATHERERS — April 2026



The Mother. A titanic organism, humanity's home and ravenous god.

Housing sprouts like fungus from flesh, wrapped in membranes, supported by cartilage. No stone. No metal.

At the Last Fort, Bulelani is no ordinary crew leader. He can read, he knows how to move, he's respected. And he has a debt to collect.

Qaqamba is a fool. He talks too much, he's clumsy, he doesn't understand what's happening around him. But he'd do anything to avoid work. Even help collect a debt.

Five gatherers who don't trust each other. Two grueling weeks. A perfect plan that won't stop falling apart.

"The Mother feeds the child. The child feeds the Mother."

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