

# Shintiarã

ROLE-PLAYING  
GAME

## The Legend of Toren and the Ashen Field

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# The legend of Toren and the Ashen Field

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Toren lived in a large isolated farm at the end of the valley. That morning he awoke before dawn to go to work, as his father, his grandfather and the father of his grandfather before him. He got into the Machine, fired it up and drove the rusty vehicle towards the field.

After about half an hour, having arrived in the middle of the field, he grew concerned about checking the state of the Machine. He did not know anything about engines, but at least he knew how to recognize the smell of something burning and had learned to check the fuel level. It was a miracle that that wreck still worked, quite a miracle. His father always told him not to use it, but in recent years he had found it very comfortable not to travel the road on foot. Under the bright early morning light, he extracted his tools from the trunk and prepared to get to work.

He then put his back into mowing, even though the early-morning hours were still cool. A young man no more, but not yet elderly, accustomed to sweating on the fields.

At a certain point he heard a voice coming from the ground, a voice which Toren initially pretended not to notice.

“Who am I?” said the voice.

Toren didn't pay any attention to it and grabbed the pitchfork to pick up the sheafs of wheat.

“Who am I?”

Toren acted as if nothing had happened. The voice that came from the ground began to speak again, but with a harsher tone.

“Tell me Toren, who has guaranteed your family's well-being for a thousand generations?”

“My family is not as ancient as you say” Toren finally answered raising his eyes to the sky.

A chuckle in the air was heard in response. Then the



voice insisted: “Then, Toren, who am I?”

“Not today, I am tired today, I want to work in peace.”

The voice seemed really annoyed.

“You, work? Ah! That's a nice one! And what do you think I do? Who supplies your precious fuel? Tell me! Who prepares your Earth? I prepare the ground, defend it from the breakup that dogs it! Who, Toren, who gives you this beautiful cornfield? And do I ask something in return? Nothing! nothing, I say!”

Toren planted the pitchfork in the ground and turned serious.

“You are right, sorry, I am at your disposal.”

The voice turned cheerful once again.

“Who am I?”

Toren seemed to answer according to a ritual that he knew by heart, that he was used to reciting.

“You are Gumna, the spirit of the earth. Among the entities you are dearest to me. In you there is no need to believe: you are not a god, you are not a person. You speak to me only because my mind wills it. In you there is need to believe: to become a god, to be a true person. I speak to you only because you want it.”

The voice seemed very satisfied.

“Exactly, Toren! See? You have your earth, healthy and rich. What do I ask in return? Nothing, after all! Only to be recognized for what I am, every time that I want to. Ah! It's always like this with you! Ever since you were a child you've always been a rebel, Toren, why don't you have the Seven Crystals with you?”

“You know why.”

“Why don't you have the Seven sacred Crystals with you, Toren? Tell me!”

“Because I don't like being the Sorcerer, I like to work the land, simply being a farmer.”

“Ever since you were a child you've always been a rebel, Toren. You don't crave power, you only want to be

a farmer, whilst I have made you a sorcerer, as your father before you! Your family finds favour with me from many generations, precisely because you are so humble.”

“My family is not as ancient as you say, Gumna, not that I know of”

Toren thought that it was just like being married: after forty years one tends to already know what the other will say and why, and it becomes impossible to correct character defects. So it was between him and the voice.

For hours there was silence. Toren went back to work with sickle and pitchfork till the morning became torrid. Then he went back to the Machine to take a water-bottle that he had brought from home to drink from. On the back seat lay a leather belt with seven different coloured crystals inserted in just as many eyelets.

The voice made itself heard again.

“Wear the Seven Crystals and go to the Temple, now. There many people wait for you. They seek the help of a Sorcerer of Gumna, and (guess what?) You are the Sorcerer of Gumna! Eh, eh!”

Having interrupted its laughter, it continued: “Many people are waiting for you at the temple: some of them are people just like any other, but others are Whoever”

Toren started. The voice continued: “Be careful. You know that I don’t like this Whoever. He and his wife are... strange. I’ve always known him, but I have never really understood him.”

“Whoever? Jerio Whoever? He is here?” asked Toren.

The voice did not answer, evidently it supposed to have already made itself clear enough.

Toren looked at his beautiful field and thought about the job that he still had to do. He sighed, put the tools in the trunk, then climbed into the Machine again, turned it on and went back towards the large isolated farm in the middle of the valley. “... and that there is my house anyway, not the temple” he said to himself.

Through the open car window the voice was heard in response. “Who am I?” Toren tried not to answer for a while.

In fact, in front of the large farm that was Toren’s house, there were twenty or so people sweating due to the midday sun. They had come in search of treatment and comfort from the Sorcerer, just as the voice had anticipated.

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Before he got out of the car, Toren donned the leather belt with the Seven Crystals and glanced at the people lined up in front of the gate of his shop.

“Which one of them will he be?” he thought. They all seemed common people at first glance, inhabitants of the valleys seeking treatment. He walked through the people who stared at him in silence. He didn’t utter a single word as he opened the wooden door and went into the hut that he used as both workshop and study: a cabin made of crudely nailed wooden boards beside the farm.

The space inside was bare but orderly: one shelf that bore some labeled jars, a desk with some stacked parchments and writing materials, a trunk with a big padlock, a stool, a small wooden bed with a clean blanket.

As he sat on the stool, Toren extracted his register from the desk drawer and opened it. He wrote the date on a blank page (his family used its own calendar invented by his great-great-grandfather, different from the official one used by the Three Feuds) and invited the first guest in line to enter.

Time went by, patients came and left as Toren became more and more nervous. He didn’t know the aspect with which Whoever would turn up in and studied every guest gloomily, but one at a time into his study came seemingly normal people and with seemingly normal problems: “My arm hurts, I can’t see from one eye, my husband betrays me, my garden does not produce the pumpkins it used to...”

Two farmers, a hunter, a carpenter, even a merchant come from who knows which city in the east. All waited for something: a physician, a magician, a counsellor, a diviner, a herbalist... What did they think? That he enjoyed himself?

“Hold these plants, do not sleep facing the moon, give your husband this remedy...”

He lazily gave advice which had been handed down from preceding generations. Sometimes even he didn’t believe in it and was tempted to give completely invented answers, instead of repeating what he had been taught. Yet, almost unwillingly, he had to admit that it worked every time, just like the remedies prepared by his ancestors had always worked.

“Next!”

The last patient of the day was a gentle old man, that had difficulty in standing up. He was aided and sustained by a boy wearing worn-out clothes. Toren was disappointed and, doubting what he had been





told that morning, began asking routine questions, noting the answers on the diary.

“What’s your name, old man? Have you already come here in the past?”

“My name is Ronu, and it is the first time come here, Master.”

Toren was overwhelmed.

“You are Ronu of Three Earths?”

“Yes... you see, my knees..”

“Two weeks ago I already gave your nephew an ointment for your knees.”

“Yes, yes... but you see the knee still hurts badly.”

“Your nephew was worried about you, because you live by yourself in the mountains and he is your only living relative.”

“Exactly, exactly! now, you see...”

Toren turned towards the young man, who looked approximately fourteen years old.

“Then who’s this kind boy that accompanies you?”

The boy look at him with an open smile: “My name is Geriadjuvant, sir “

“Yes, yes...” the old man continued “a good boy, good indeed, he accompanied me here... two days on foot... if it weren’t for him...”

Toren interrupted him again: “Let’s have a look at this knee.”

Without speaking he lifted the elderly mountaineer’s worn-out trousers and verified the situation summarily.

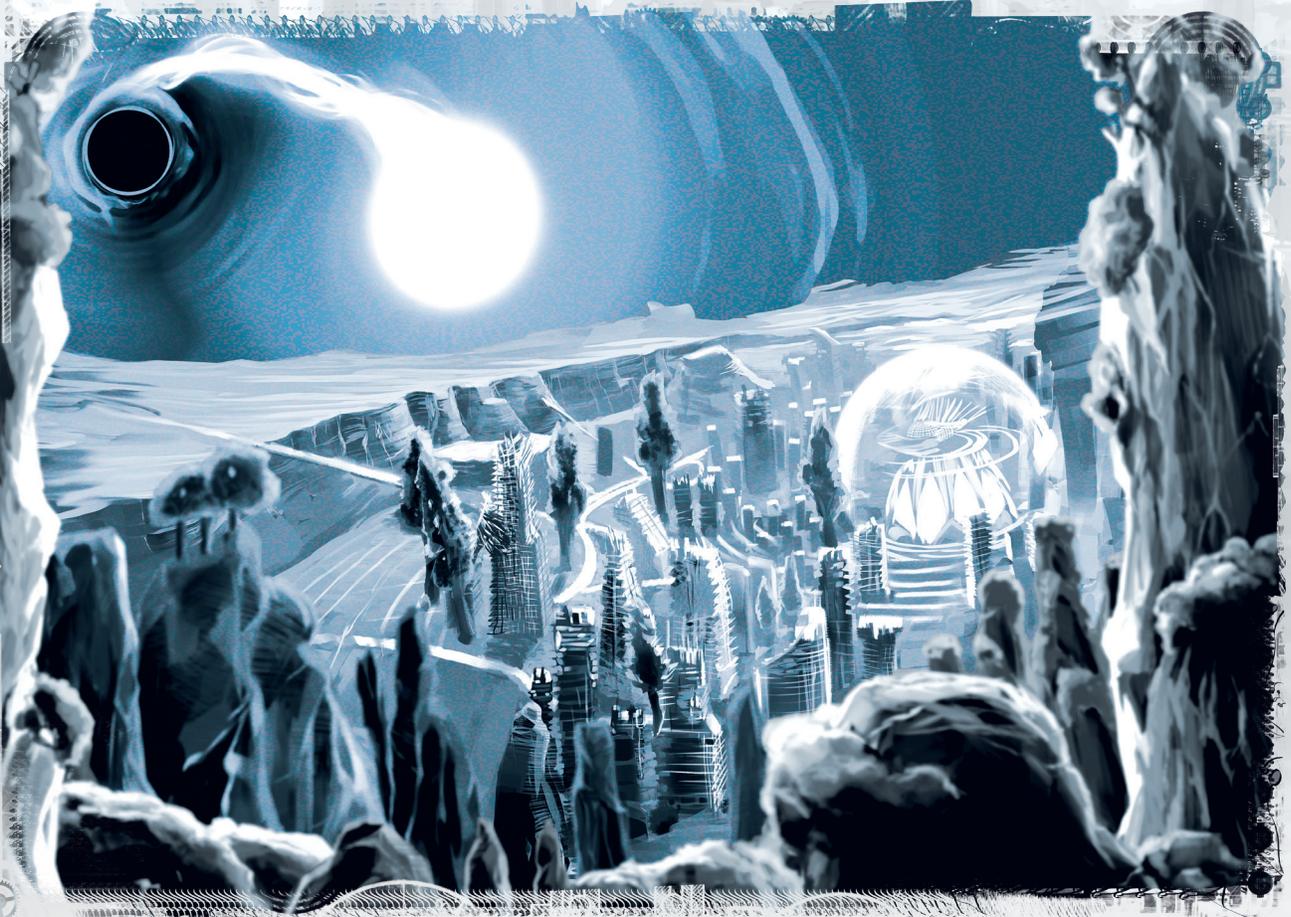
“There is little we can do at your age, Ronu. In the next two months you will use a new ointment that will prepare for you tonight. You will be my guests for tonight, there are two cots in the back.”

“End... endless thanks, I don’t know... I really don’t know how to...”

“Put the coins in the wooden box, as is customary “ concluded Toren authoritatively. Payments were meager, but were needed in order to acquire the crystals, which were the access key to the superior talents, to the energetic forces bound to that entity that he had learned to call Gumna, who oversaw the forces of earth.

The old man in poor health placed two gold Foils in the box on the ground. He then settled himself in the back-shop, lay down on the cot and, exhausted, fell almost immediately asleep.

Toren remained alone with the boy, who looked at



him with a bold smile on his lips.

"You have recognized me, Sorcerer. Your entity, what's its name... Gumna, right? It must have warned you " said the young man who dressed in rags.

Toren did not answer straight away.

"I don't know what sort of a nickname Geriadjvant is, but I don't like the fact that you come around here uninvited, Whoever. Word spreads, legends are written and studied. All I know about you is that you bring bad luck."

"You believe in bad luck?"

"Yes, it is among the few things that I believe in."

The young man did not lose his smile and rubbed his coat just like a shy teenager.

"You shouldn't have recognized me. I have come to deal with an important transition."

"Tell me about it."

"I couldn't tell you anything even if I wanted to and I believe you wouldn't understand anyway."

The boy's attitude bothered him.

"You're right. There are many things that do not understand: the sacred mystery of wheat germination, the leavening of bread, dew. There are things however that I do understand: that our world is breaking up in the struggle between forces beyond human comprehension. Forces that take on different names, different forms and that play mysterious. I have been taught how to make use of some and shy from others ever since I was a young boy. I have been told that Siray, the sun, is for the good of the world, whilst Murya is for its destruction. But which side is Jerio Whoever on?"

The young man smiled again and his blue eyes lit up.

"You're nice!"

Toren decided to forget about it. "Don't expect special treatment, your cot is the one next to the old man. You can sleep here tonight. Tomorrow you will leave."

The young man made a half bow, then lay down on the cot stretching himself. "Thank you, you're very kind."

"My family has been kind through generations, but it has never been of any use to us, it seems."

"Your family is famous in these parts."

"Too much so, we are little more than farmers after all."

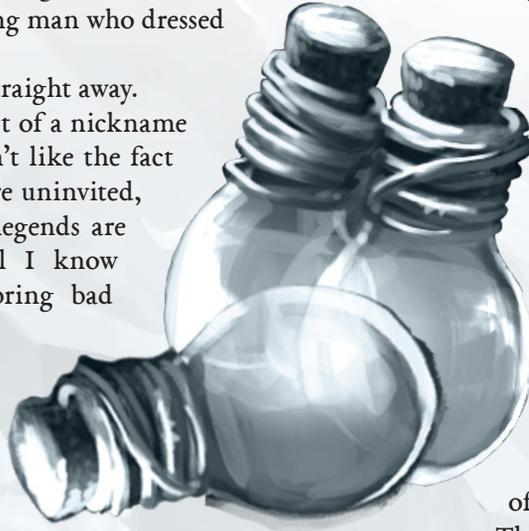
"Is that great cornfield that I crossed yours?"

"Yes, they call it the Field of Ashes, because they say that a great battle took place there, many centuries ago, before my family settled around here... but why am I telling you these things? I guess you know them already, right?"

"I love stories" he said, covering himself with the blanket. At night, in the valley, it was cool even during summer.

Toren was disheartened and hunched his shoulders: "I love stories too, but it seems that you are of few words. Good night."

The boy was sleeping already. Toren started working on the arthritis ointment he would give to the old man the next day.



## -1

On the following morning the sorcerer awoke later than usual. Dawn was breaking already. He climbed out of bed, approached the washbasin and filled it with water from a pitcher. As he washed himself, he felt a pleasant sensation as the ice-cold water flowed onto his skin, definitely waking him up.

The first thought went to his cornfield and to the work that he had left only half done the day before. The second thought went to his two guests.

He descended into the barnyard and found them both basking in the sun's first rays of a day that promised only to be hotter than the previous one. The old man was sitting on a wooden crate and massaged his knees with the ointment that Toren had left beside his bed the night before. The young man was playing, running after the hens that scratched around in the courtyard. He chuckled merrily and went from short pursuits to jumps and somersaults. The ointment had evidently applied its effects already because the old man also smiled and incited him: "Well done ! Uh! Catch it, catch it!"

Even Toren stopped for a minute to look at the boy. He expressed such joy, such naturalness, that in his heart he envied and so, quite by chance, he thought about the fact that he was the only member of his family never to have married. He felt lonely and, after



all, perhaps the company of an old man and a strange god-child wouldn't have been bad for him.

He looked around. He saw the deep sky and the mountaintops, beyond the valley, which the sun's rays had already reached. He felt the coolness of the morning on his skin and the thousand-odd signs of life that moved around the farm. On the whole, he thought, it was a good time to devote himself to his favourite activity.

"Let's go, climb into the Machine."

Old Ronu, still smiling, looked at him without understanding: "Machine? What's a Machine?" then a memory of the previous day emerged. "Machine! It's that sort of iron wagon that moves without animals, right?"

"Come on, the Field of Ashes is not a long way off."

Toren made some room by moving the work tools. The three climbed into the car. When the blonde boy got in, Toren had a feeling that the car vibrated slightly, only for a brief instant. He looked inquisitively at the young man and received a naive smile for an answer.

As he started it, he turned to the old man: "A Machine is something very rare, old man, and maintaining it in working conditions has cost my family a lot of effort. It was given to my great-great-grandfather for some services he did to I don't remember which aristocrat. My father always told me never to use it to go to the Field of Ashes... ah, my father and his obsessive recommendations! What's better than travelling without labour? Hold on tightly, one can go nearly as fast as a horse: it really seems these are lucky days for you!"

The old man nodded jauntily: "Oh yes, first the ointment then this... it's all marvellous!"

After about half an hour all three were out in the wheat field working. Ronu and Geriadjuvant helped as they could, worn out by the heat, but strangely cheerful. Toren looked vigorous and untiring. Gumna's voice did not seem to want to disturb him.

In the hours that followed the old man touched his knees now and again, still unwilling to believe he could walk without suffering, and repeated: "Never felt better! It's a miracle, a miracle..."

The blonde young man looked at him, laughed and worked hard in preparing the sheaves.

At midday Toren decided that it was time for a break. The day had become torrid and he was drenched in sweat. He approached the Machine and drew forth the water-bottle. As he sipped greedily he began to think.

It was all so strange. For decades he had never

accepted anyone else's company, yet today he had brought two complete strangers to his field. He had never worked so intensely, and what could he think of this old man, so active and euphoric? The mysterious boy... perhaps he was the reason why things were going this way. If the fair-haired boy really was that Jerio Whoever of which legends spoke, if he really was a kind of force of nature, perhaps he was able to amplify everyone's emotions. It was said that, from the birth of the world, Whoever was present every time something extraordinary happened. But was he only a spectator or the cause of it all?

Toren instinctively retrieved the leather belt with the Seven Crystals from the Machine and donned it. He felt reassured knowing he could draw upon his own magic.

The boy with the worn-out clothes, after having prepared a sheaf, approached the Machine. His gaze repeatedly covered both field and sky as he hummed the tune of a folk song.

It was then that Ronu, the old man, observing a point in the ground a couple of meters from the Machine, exclaimed: "Hey! Hey! What is this? Look what I've found!"

He picked up a metallic object roughly as big as a pumpkin from the ground. Staggering he approached the car, so that he could place his discovery on the bonnet.

Whoever, with a strangely serious face, turned towards Toren and said: "So, this is it."

The old man placed the rusty soil-encrusted object onto the car, but in the exact moment that it touched the bonnet everything changed terribly quickly...

Toren's father loved to speak. He was accustomed to repeating that Shintiara, their world, could seem complex and unpredictable, but was in fact governed by logic.

"Our role is to apply universal laws. Live a regular life, try to abide by the rules. It doesn't matter what people say: miracles don't exist, there are only complex causes that lead to unexpected outcomes. In the end it only comes down to repeating what you've been taught."

When Toren looked at the sky, that day, his first thought went to his father.

"And how do you explain this, then?"



The sky turned completely black in just a few seconds and was torn by lightning of a strange purplish energy. The earth began to tremble while the valley pulsed to the rhythmic beat of deep underground explosions. The outline of the horizon seemed to fold, as though the contour of the valley's mountains were made from the edge of a black curtain shaken by the wind.

The noise was so strong that Toren covered his ears with his hands. He saw Ronu fall to the ground. The young man, on the other hand, was strangely calm. Worried about the old man's health, Toren decided to resort to his talents. He invoked Gumna pronouncing words learnt by heart from a time long before: the ground moved and a kind of earthen shell encased the terrified Ronu. He would have been safe under there. Again reciting what he had learnt, he instructed the earth to guide him into the shelter he had created, if things took a turn for the worse.

"Worse than this? What on earth is happening, Whoever?" the Sorcerer shouted.

Background noise made perceiving the boy's answer very difficult.

"Two objects that shouldn't exist have come into contact with each other. The world has warped."

"What? Two objects that..." Toren didn't manage to complete the sentence. A violent explosion forced the car's bonnet open, made them both fall to the ground and hurled the object that the bonnet sustained into the air. Toren saw it better: it had the shape of a sort of streamlined cone, rusty red in colour. A metal splinter drove itself into Toren's arm. He extracted the piece of plate from his flesh and screamed in pain rolling on the ground.

He too should have found shelter under the earthen wall, he thought. But shelter from what? The world was warping in his cornfield? He saw out of the corner of his eye that Whoever was trying to get up. His Machine was an object that shouldn't exist? It was part of his family's inheritance. Was there really a reason for which he had always been told not to bring it to the Field of Ashes? Because of that ancient battle that had been fought here? But what was the real danger? That rusty thing which had fallen some metres away from him?

He tried to stand up ignoring the blood and the pain in his arm. The noise had become so strong that it suddenly seemed he had gone partially deaf.

Grave and muffled sounds reached his ears. He went towards the boy and grabbed him by his jacket. He could hardly hear his own voice.

"I know it's your fault! What the devil is happening? Tell me!"

The boy didn't seem to get upset: "I do not yet have an active role in this, Sorcerer, but I will shortly, you will see."

Toren had barely heard a thing of what the young man said, but it seemed clear that he wouldn't have obtained much from him. He thought of killing him, but he thought he would have had neither the time or probably neither the skill to do so. He staggered towards the fallen object to take a closer look. He tried to retrieve a fragment of memory that could tell him what he was looking at.

He had spent ages studying the family books, but when he sat at the kitchen table, with his mother busy at the cookers, he loved to concentrate his gaze on the view rather than on the thick pages of the manuscripts.

"You have always been a rebel, Sorcerer." The voice of Gumna, the spirit of the Earth, echoed in his brain again. "You never wanted to study. You are the last of a family I have protected for years."

"The last of my family? How am I the last?" thought Toren. "Concentrate, think, think. An image, an image from somewhere, attached to your cerebral cortex. The noise is deafening, the earth trembles. That's it, there were books on travellers who had searched all of Shintara looking for objects that shouldn't exist. My father made me learn of some objects that came from other eras by heart, from the past or future. But they were legends, only stories, superstition. My arm hurts. Seconds pass and the world goes crazy. I break into a cold sweat. I wipe my forehead dry, I now have blood on my eyebrows. Temporal paradoxes, just like miracles, don't exist, only complex causes that lead to unexpected results exist, isn't that right dad? And if two objects that should not exist meet in my cornfield, what happens then? Whatever it is, I am now damnably in the middle of it. I must make the other object disappear, remove it. My arm is bleeding and the world shakes. Perhaps that sort of rusty cone reminds me of something. There was a little miniature image on a parchment: what did the caption say? I am still wearing the Seven Sacred stones, I can still invoke the power of Earth. My father taught me everything about it: Black obsidian, Red amber, Pyrite, Rose quartz, Lapis lazuli, Amethyst and a large Diamond. I repeat the formulae as if they were mathematical equations. May an earthen



arm form itself! Gumna carries out my orders: the ground moves, a many-tonned earthen tentacle rises. From the corner of my eye I see Whoever behind me. I should have killed you last night, I shouldn't have let your innocent looks influence me... Gumna! Casts your earthen arm on that object, destroy it! The world is going crazy and I have lost a lot of blood. The tentacle from the ground is lashing out to... to what? Hey, I remember the caption, it said 'Bomb: highly explosive object "... Gumna, don't do it!'"

An explosion followed. It was not an ordinary explosion such as that of a normal explosive device. In Toren the Sorcerer's cornfield, the Bomb exploded and amplified the shattering of energies that had arisen when it touched the machine a thousandfold. At that point many things could have happened, because the timelines of many parallel universes could have overlapped.

Jerio Whoever at the time of the explosion let out a cry that managed to exceed the noise from the Bomb.

"I am here!"

He spread his arms and a vortex of energy materialized around him, and quick as a flash it surrounded Toren, protecting him. The Sorcerer so found himself in a force bubble and was unable to see anything but light around him.

Jerio Whoever, standing next to him, did not seem as young and naive as he did before. Toren noticed that his face was timeless. His voice reverberated harmoniously: "Our world, Toren, is in constant danger of destruction due to timewarps. Yet, these timewarps are my realm. I, who cannot directly intervene in the things of the world, am the supreme master of what happens when two paradoxes collide and the world warps. If I am present, I can decide the fate of those who come across these fluxes, such as yourself.

Toren, as far as I know, your family has always played a social role. Even though only few know of the lives you have helped, I know how many kingdoms would have fallen, how many mothers would not have given birth, how many lives would have been lost without you. You saved the lives of many who became terrible assassins, of engineers who caused buildings to collapse because of their incorrect

calculations, of warlords who killed and plundered. And I do not speak only of your past. To cancel you from history would mean changing too much of what has already passed and too much of what must still come to pass.

Too many plots which have been woven through the centuries would change and too much of the work I have done would be lost. This is why I decided to intervene, because I am lazy after all and I do not want to redo what I have already done. When you restart this history, you will pass the knowledge of how to avoid the Bomb onto your sons."

"I don't understand, how can I restart history?"

"In fact you must redo what you have already done: you nearly made it this time, without saving yourself. Next time it will be better, I hope. Do you remember what the founder of your family's name was?"

"They told me he bore my name: Toren..."

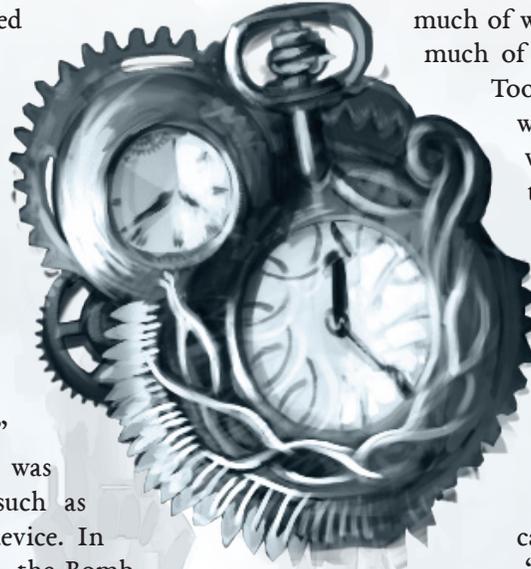
"Indeed, that Toren is you. Now and then, quite rarely to be honest, history unfolds as a circle and not as a straight line. So you are Toren-who-exploded-in-the-field but also Toren-the-founder-of-the-family."

"You're kidding me, Whoever. If life were a circle, history would be destined to forever repeat itself. I would be my own successor? That's impossible."

"Consider it as though it was your double that travelled the days of old, if it's easier for you. The only thing that is impossible to know is whether the double is your ancestor or yourself. I can break the rules of the flow of time and split history in two. In this case, I do it to give you a second chance. I bet you have already asked yourself why they call me Whoever."

Endless seconds passed, as the two floated in the light. Then there was a brief moment in which Toren understood and risked going crazy: awareness of being a product of such a history could have killed him. Jerio Whoever passed a hand on his forehead and removed the memory of what they had said, isolating that awareness to his instinct, so that it might guide his future choices.

Then the light turned blinding and vanished. Toren found himself in the same valley, but many years before, when the world of Shintiara was younger. There was no farm in the wild valley yet.



There were no cornfields and the fame of a Sorcerer of Gumna had not yet been spread in the valleys. He looked around, confused: he had no memory of how he had ended up there.

He was naked and on his knees, with his hands buried in the ground and a bleeding arm. That ground! Before getting scared (he was a lone man and without memory after all), he thought of how important the ground he was touching was for him. Then he heard a maternal voice come from the ground and deep within him he thought he had always known it.

“Do you know who I am?”

“No” answered Toren “but I feel that I need you.”

“What you say is true and your humility is honourable. Now, however, sit and listen to me, you are not that young anymore and you have so many things to learn. I am Gumna, the spirit of the Earth.”

## 1

Many years after that there was an explosion in the same valley. It was not an ordinary explosion. In Toren the Sorcerer’s cornfield, the Bomb exploded and amplified the shattering of energies that had arisen when it touched the machine a thousandfold. At that point many things could have happened, because the timelines of many parallel universes could have overlapped, but when the explosion ended, the world stopped warping.

If one might have been able to look at the scene from an eagle’s back, one might have observed the great black circle that the fire had etched into the golden field. In the centre of the ashen circle lay a plate wreck of what was once the Machine. No living being was to be seen around.

Suddenly the ground spiritedly heaved itself up. Just like a fountain, the ashes spewed tons of earth. It took nearly a minute for two human figures to be expelled too, covered in mud and roots.

Toren managed to stand and helped old Ronu. First he looked around himself and thought about his poor wheat. He thought of the blonde boy immediately after that: he was nowhere to be seen. Then he looked at what was left of the Machine and smiled: “Perhaps there was a reason, if they taught me not to use it.”

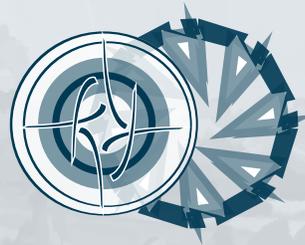
Right after that, in his heart, he thanked his father and that day from many years before when he had insisted that he study a long list of objects that legend regarded as from another time. “If I had recognized the Bomb a second later, I would

not have had the time to use my skills to protect and shelter myself underground with the old man, while the earthen arm I summoned was causing it to explode.”

A voice was heard from the still smoking soil. “You have always be a rebel, Toren. But at least today you remembered some of the precious teachings your ancestors provided you with” said Gumna, indifferent to the state of anxiety and adrenaline that still raced through Toren’s blood, on account of everything he had risked that day.

“I am angry with you, Gumna “ replied the Sorcerer. “You know that if there’s one thing I believe in it’s bad luck, and in the hour of greatest peril, when the bomb was about to explode, you thought I was doomed, you jinx! Ah, but as you can see I was not destined to be the last of my family!”

The voice chuckled and then in a sweet, maternal voice said: “Oh! Yes you were! But things improved unexpectedly, don’t you think? And now answer me, Toren the Sorcerer: who am I?”



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