

THE TRIAD

... A Trilogy Of Quantum Stories



Dedicated To ...

'The Discrete Quanta' ...

The Story Told In Flashes

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THE PREFACE

*This is a compilation of a trilogy of short stories written in the year 2024. Putting them together here as a **Memento** for the future.*

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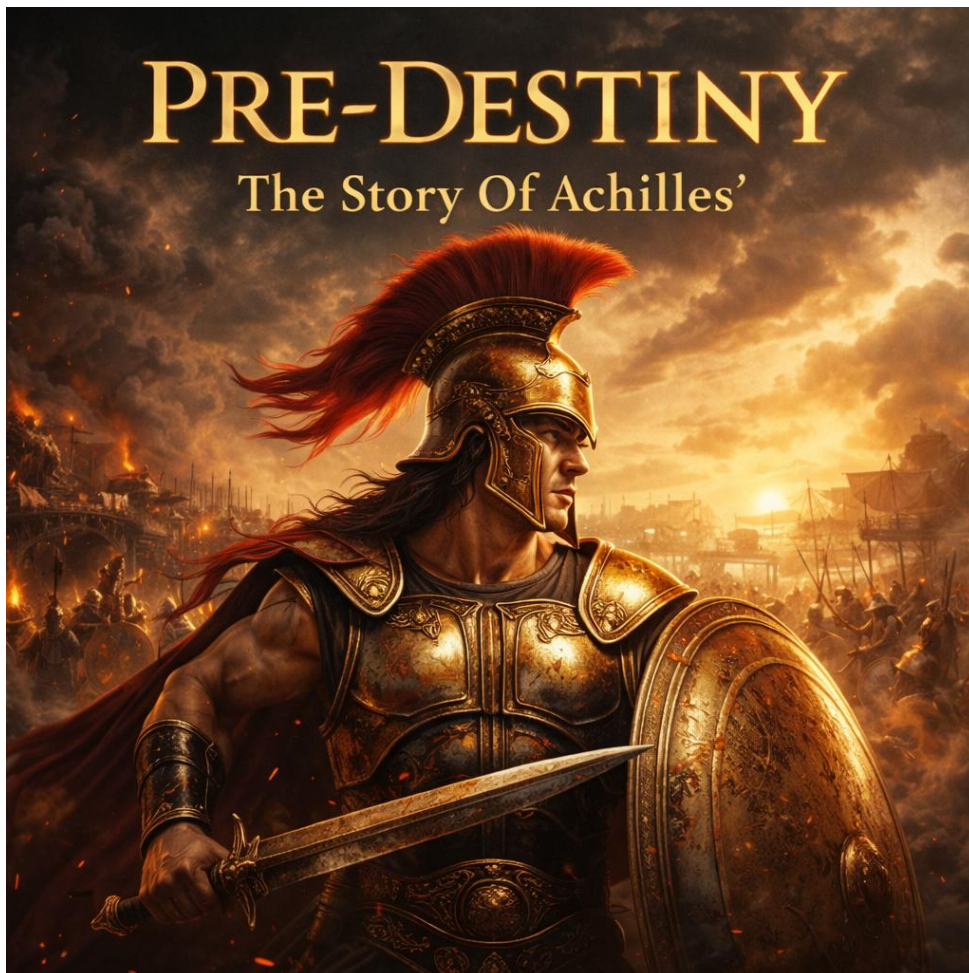
~ A. K. Beetle

Dec 29, 2025

PART I - PRE-DESTINY

~ PRE-DESTINY ~

... The Story Of Achilles



“Slave as she was ... my soul adored the dame.”

~ Achilles

Homer’s Iliad, 800 B.C.

[Translated by Alexander Pope, 1715]

HOMER'S ILIAD

Iliad is the saga of the *Trojan War*, a historical event in which the Minoan city of *Troy* in north-west Asia Minor was destroyed after a prolonged siege by the Greeks, toward the end of the thirteenth century BCE.

The original composition of *Iliad*, which happened in the eight century BCE, is attributed to *Homer* - who is perhaps a mythical figure himself. Scholars have noted that the Homeric poems are likely to have evolved organically from the previous traditions of oral poetry which took inspiration from the memories and glories of Greece in the *Bronze Age*.

Homer's Iliad is a eulogy for the heroism of *Achilles*. However, ***Pre-Destiny*** is a reinterpretation of the myth, within the realm of possibilities.

THE PRELUDE

The siege described in Iliad was prolonged, mainly because Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Greek army, refused to fight.

After a bitter quarrel with Agamemnon over honour and war prizes, Achilles withdrew from battle. His absence severely weakened the Greeks, allowing the Trojans to gain strength and push them back.

Without Achilles' unmatched skill and leadership, the Greeks suffered heavy losses and could not break Troy's defences, causing the war to drag on until Achilles finally returned to combat ...

1

Breseis was the dignified daughter of *Briseus*, the revered old priest of *Lyrnessus*, and widely admired for her long golden hair, deep blue eyes and mellifluous voice. When she played the lyre, even the harshest critic was mesmerized.

Her remarkable elegance caught the eye of King *Mynes* of *Lyrnessus*, son of *Evenus*. The enraptured King ended up marrying *Breseis*, despite being well past his prime.

Mynes was a considerate man, and treated her delicately. However, *Breseis* was not content with her royal marriage, to which her family had readily agreed to. She kept herself confined to her chambers, aloof from everything happening around her. She found solace only in her music.

King *Mynes* did not anticipate that *Breseis*, with her ample grace but simple tastes, would shy away from the limelight of being the Queen of *Lyrnessus*. After a while, he realized that the marriage had been a mistake. Yet, he was very fond of *Breseis* and forgave her oddities.

Lyrnessus was part of *Dardania*, an ancient region in *Troad*, better known as *Cicilia*. It was a quiet and peaceful city, thriving on trade and commerce with the neighboring cities of *Thebes* and *Chryses*. However, the days of peace and prosperity were numbered.

Trouble came when the *Trojan War* broke out between the *Greeks* and the *Trojans*. And the cities of *Dardania* were allied to the marvelous city of *Ilium* (Troy), which was under siege by the *Greeks*.

One chilly morning, King *Mynes* sent for *Breseis* urgently.

“We are in mortal danger, my dear,” sighed the old King. “The *Greeks* are enraged at us for aiding the *Trojans*. They have now set out to conquer the *Cicilian* cities, in order to weaken *Ilium*. *Thebes* has already fallen and the *Greeks* are now at our ramparts. A battle is going to commence soon.”

Mynes kept silent for a while, looking gravely at the growing concern on *Breseis*’ face.

“The *Greeks* are running low on resources in the relentless *Trojan War*. They have looted and plundered *Thebes* mercilessly. Not even a single child’s life has been spared,” he continued slowly. “I am afraid the same fate awaits *Lyrnessus* ... if I am unable to defend the city.”

“Is there no chance of victory, Sir?” *Breseis* now spoke with steely calmness.

The King drew a deep breath.

“We will try our best, my dear,” he shook his head. “But the invading *Greeks* are being led by *Achilles*, who is yet to lose a battle.”

Mynes paused once more, to let his words sink in.

“I want you to go to the temple and hide in the dungeons underneath. I have informed your father to arrange for everything.”

Breseis nodded solemnly and was about to retire.

“One last thing, my dear,” The King said softly. “It may be better to use this, than to be dishonored by the *Greeks*.”

Mynes unleashed his knife from its sheath and handed it to her.

Breseis calmly accepted the parting gift, as its profound implication reverberated in her disturbed mind.

Breseis had heard about *Achilles*, who had become a local legend.

Achilles was the prince of *Phthia* and an exceptionally bold leader of an elite legion known as *Myrmidons*. Unequivocally feared by the *Trojans* and respected by the *Greeks*, he was a demi-god: half-god and half-mortal. He was the son of *Thetis*, an immortal sea nymph and *Peleus*, the mortal King of *Phthia*.

Zeus, the mighty King of Gods, had once wished to marry *Thetis*. *Poseidon*, his brother and God of Seas, had also vied for her hand in marriage. However, *Prometheus*, God of Fire, warned them about a prophecy that *Thetis* will bear a son who would be much greater than the father.

Hearing this prophecy, both *Zeus* and *Poseidon* backed out and *Thetis* married *Peleus*. However, *Zeus*, who remained an admirer of *Thetis*, presided over the marriage festivities.

Eris, Goddess of Discord, was offended for not being invited to the marriage party of special magnificence. So, she sneaked in to the party and mischievously slipped a golden apple at the feet of the three great Goddesses of *Olympus*: *Hera* (*Zeus*' sister and wife), *Athena* (Goddess of Wisdom and War) and *Aphrodite* (Goddess of Beauty and Love). Inscribed on the golden apple were the words:

“For The Fairest”

Tempted to possess the golden apple, the three Goddesses asked *Zeus* to choose who was the fairest among them. *Zeus* prudently declined to make that unsettling judgement. He saw a handsome young man shepherding his flocks on the slopes of Mount *Ida*, and asked him to make the difficult choice.

This young man was *Paris*, one of the sons of King *Priam* and Queen *Hecuba* of *Ilium*. Before he was born, *Hecuba* had a frightening dream that she was giving birth to a flaming torch. And *Cassandra*, *Priam*'s prophetess daughter, further prophesied that the newborn will bring an inevitable destruction to the city. So, *Paris* was abandoned and left to die outside Troy.

However, some shepherds found the baby and raised it as their own. As a young boy, *Paris* went back to *Troy* to participate in festival games and was recognized by *Cassandra*. He was then restored into the royal family, but *Priam* still made him work as his shepherd.

When *Zeus* asked *Paris* to select the fairest of the three Goddesses, he chose *Aphrodite* without reservation, as she had guilefully bribed him with a magic potion that could charm the most beautiful woman in the world. As a result, both *Hera* and *Athena* were quite annoyed with *Paris* and held a grudge against him.

Soon after the marriage, *Achilles* was born. *Thetis* was fond of her beautiful child. However, she was frightened by yet another prophecy that *Achilles* was doomed to die a glorious death in battle at a very young age. She thus attempted to make *Achilles* immortal by dipping him in the river *Styx*. As a result, *Achilles* became impervious to mortal wounds and could self-heal, but he remained vulnerable at his left heel (the part of body by which *Thetis* had held him).

Fifteen years passed.

Then, King *Priam* sent *Paris* to the city state of *Sparta* as a diplomatic ambassador. *Paris* became besotted with *Helen*, the beautiful wife of the current Spartan King *Menelaus*.

Helen was the illegitimate daughter of *Zeus* and Queen *Leda* and was brought up by *Leda* and her husband, *Tyndareus*, the previous King of *Sparta*. *Helen* had numerous suitors due to her seductive youth. When she chose to marry *Menelaus*, King *Tyndareus* made all the rejected suitors swear to defend her choice, in order to prevent any trouble in future.

Paris believed that *Helen* was the most beautiful woman in the world, who was promised to him by *Aphrodite*, and so he seduced her using the magic potion. Later, when *Menelaus* had left *Sparta* to arrange for the funeral of his *Cretan* grandfather, *Paris* persuaded *Helen* to run away with him. The lovers fled to *Troy*, along with *Menelaus*' vast treasury.

When *Menelaus* realized that his wife had eloped with *Paris*, he went to Troy and demanded *Helen* to be handed over. But King *Priam* refused.

Insulted by the *Trojans*, *Menelaus* persuaded his brother *Agamemnon*, King of *Mycenae* and husband of *Helen's* sister *Clytemnestra*, to assemble a large fleet of contingents from all the oath-takers at *Helen's* marriage and other *Greek* allies.

It was time to restore the honor of *Sparta* by declaring war on *Troy*.

However, Goddess *Artemis* sent the wind against them to prevent *Agamemnon's* fleet from setting sail. *Artemis* demanded the sacrifice of *Agamemnon's* daughter *Iphigenia*. The ruthless *Agamemnon* lured *Iphigenia* by promising to make her the bride of *Achilles* (whom she loved), and then slaughtered her mercilessly. The sacrifice pleased *Artemis* and she then sent favorable winds. Thus, the fleet of more than 1000 ships could finally sail towards *Troy*.

However, a wedge was firmly driven between *Agamemnon* and *Achilles*. *Achilles* loathed *Agamemnon* for sacrificing his daughter. He was quite mad with anger, but decided to keep quiet.

En route to *Troy*, he was further miffed at *Agamemnon* when the great archer *Philoctetes*, who had inherited the mighty bow of *Heracles*, was abandoned on the isle of *Lemnos* due to a stinking wound in his leg.

Achilles had joined *Agamemnon's* army to fight in the greatest war in *Greek* history, in spite of being warned by *Thetis* of his looming death as per the prophecy. However, it was glory in war that the fearless *Achilles* chose to pursue. And neither the loss of his beloved *Iphigenia*, nor his friend *Philoctetes*, would prevent him from fighting in the *Trojan War*.

Glory was all that *Achilles* wanted single-mindedly, even at the cost of his own life. At least that is what was popularly believed. Only *Patroclus*, his cherished childhood friend, understood the real reason behind his need to fight.

It had been nine years since the *Trojan War* began. The *Greeks* held the advantage in the battlefield, but could not break through the walls of *Troy*. However, *Achilles* had instilled dread in the enemy's heart by massacring thousands in every battle fought so far.

It was no wonder that King *Mynes* had little hope to defend his city from the imminent attack of *Achilles* and his army of *Myrmidons*.

Breseis understood her husband's concern. She carefully hid the knife inside her dress and rushed to her father's temple.

Time was of essence. It was not going to be long before the impending doom.

Breseis trembled in the darkness as she heard echoes of approaching footsteps. It was not the sound of her father's gentle treading, but the vibrations from heavy footfalls of marching men.

She had been in the dungeons for the last couple of days. Her father had visited the cell daily to provide her food and news of the battle. However, he had not come today, intensifying her anxiety.

Soon, an armed figure halted at the entrance, holding a blazing torch. The flickering light from its flame casted long shadows that twisted eerily over the stony walls of the chamber.

The man observed her for a few minutes, that seems like hours to *Breseis*. He then signaled his comrades to back out, lowered his sword and took off his helmet.

In the dim light *Breseis* could see an exceptionally well-built man in his mid-twenties, with blond hair falling over a chiseled face. In contrast to his masculine demeanor, his deep-set blue eyes had the innocence of a child and stared at her in amazement.

Achilles was stunned.

The scared girl in front of him looked like his childhood sweetheart *Iphigenia*. Momentarily, he was lost in the happy memories of the past. He had once promised *Iphigenia* that he would marry her. Then the war began and *Agamemnon* sacrificed her, while *Achilles* was away assembling troops from the allies of the *Greeks*.

The girl hiding in the cold chamber was in her late teens. From her elegant dress, it seemed that she belonged to the royal family.

“Who are you?” asked *Achilles*.

His deep voice filled the cell with haunting echoes. Unknowingly, his suppressed guilt for *Iphigenia*’s death made him instinctively sympathetic towards this helpless and vulnerable girl.

“I am Queen *Breseis*, wife of King *Mynes*. And you?”

Achilles could feel the panic in her eyes, as she tried to put up a bold stance and speak with authority.

“My name is *Achilles*, son of King *Peleus* of *Phthia*. We have taken *Lyrnessus* and you are now a captive.”

A shiver passed across her skin. Yet, she resiliently tried to held her head high.

“Is our King dead?” *Breseis* asked.

“King *Mynes* died valiantly in battle. I killed him myself,” said *Achilles* as a matter of fact.

Breseis shuddered at the calmness of the proud, unrepenting voice of the killer.

“I am taking you as my war prize. Come with me,” declared *Achilles* authoritatively, as he turned to leave.

Breseis knew that the time had come to do the dreadful. She took out the knife to stab herself. The flicker of her movement made *Achilles* turn around swiftly.

“Wait!” *Achilles* raised his hand to pacify her. “You need not be scared. I assure you that no one will hurt you.”

Achilles slowly bent down to place his sword on the floor. He then extended his hand towards her and said softly, “Your city has already shed a lot of blood. Come with me. I promise no *Greek* will mistreat you while I am alive. Your honor is mine.”

Breseis felt dizzy as her mind was racing. She was afraid of death, yet it had been King *Myne*’s last wish. However, there was an unexpected sincerity in *Achilles*’ voice, which was difficult to ignore.

“Is all our army dead?” asked *Breseis*, thinking about her brothers.

“Yes. I had an order from our Commander-in-Chief, King *Agamemnon*, to kill the very last of them.”

“And my father, the priest of this temple?”

“He is alive. But he is now a prisoner of war.”

“Can you please release him?” *Breseis* pleaded hopelessly.

Achilles considered it for a moment.

“I have no quarrel with him. I will let your father go, but only if you come with me. We will take the temple’s treasury, of course.”

“Can you also spare the women and the children of *Lyrnessus*?” asked *Breseis*, surprised and encouraged by *Achilles*’ chivalry.

“I can’t deny my men their war prizes. They will take the women. If I prevent it, there may be mutiny. However, I can spare the children ... for you.

“Come with me. I will not be able to guarantee your safety if you become someone else’s prize.” *Achilles* said gravely.

Looking at his solemn eyes, *Breseis* felt a sudden urge to trust him. She lowered her knife and allowed her shivering hand to slip over *Achilles’* extended arm.



Achilles woke up with a start.

He saw *Breseis* was awake beside him, and felt her soft fingers running through his locks.

“You have been talking in your sleep. Was it a dream?” she asked.

“Yes, I saw Goddess *Hera* in a dream. She wanted me to call a meeting to find the reason for the plague that is killing our rank and file.”

“Maybe *Calchas*, the seer, can tell,” *Breseis* thought aloud as she laid her head on his warm chest.

Breseis had inadvertently fallen in love with her vigorous captor, after being brought to *Achilles*’ camp as a war prize.

From the first day itself, *Achilles* had been inclined to hear her sing and play the lyre in the evenings. He would sit silently at a distance and gaze at her, lost in his reminiscences of *Iphigenia*, that were still well-preserved in his mind. He felt a strong connection with *Breseis* while listening to her melancholic melodies under the moonlight.

Breseis was never in love with her husband, but respected the late King *Mynes* for his kindness. She mourned his death and that of her three brothers, with her music. However, her biggest trauma was due to the unpredicted death of her father. *Briseus* had hanged himself after being released by *Achilles*, when he learned that his daughter had been taken by the *Greeks*.

After a while, their mutual grief slowly turned into shared admiration and youthful passion simmered under the surface.

Initially *Breseis* was impressed that *Achilles* did not make any advances. However, despite the gratitude she felt for such respect, she soon started to wish for the contrary. She was encouraged by the fact that *Achilles* was not attentive to any other woman, but was intensely interested in her. Before long, she (her history and her character)

became the chief topic of conversation for all and sundry, as tongues began to wag in excitement. Unfounded rumors travelled all over the *Greek* camp, and she was generally envied by the females.

The gossip had little effect on *Breseis*, who was fighting her own demons.

Breseis had expected to become *Achilles*' concubine and accepted that inevitability with nonchalance. But days passed and *Achilles* remained undemanding. Meanwhile, she became helplessly attracted to him - the very man who had killed her husband and brothers. She felt deeply troubled and was unable to reconcile the growing feelings in her lonely heart with the guilt in her grieving mind.

The shy girl remained hidden from view in her tent. No one was allowed inside, except for *Achilles*. Despite the inner turmoil, her rising hopes were not dashed. One evening, she hesitantly asked him to stay the night in her tent.

They had been inseparable since then.

The *Greek* army had set up their base in the sea beach below the besieged city of Troy, near their fleet of ships. However, a deadly plague had been spreading in the camp over the last few days. Now all along the broad shore, black smoke rolled from the piles of wood on which the dead were burnt. The sea breeze carried the fetid odor of decay and burning flesh inside the tent.

"Maybe it is better to return home than to perish here by the plague," said *Achilles*, as he pulled *Breseis* closer to him. "Once the war is over, we will get married."

Breseis put her arms around him, smiling radiantly. *Achilles*, in turn, clasped her and said "I promise."

END NOTE

Depression is a common mental health condition characterized by a persistent feeling of sadness, emptiness, or loss of interest in daily activities.

Psychologically, it involves negative patterns of thinking, such as feelings of hopelessness, low self-worth, guilt, and pessimism about the future.

Individuals with depression often experience reduced motivation, difficulty concentrating, disturbed sleep and appetite, and emotional withdrawal from others.

PART II - THE AWAKENING

The world of mythos is a fascinating macrocosm of Love and War ... Agony and Bliss ... and evergreen Heroes. Sometimes they have some historical bases, sometimes they don't.

***The Awakening** is a retelling of the early life of **Buddha**, and his eternal solution for human conflict and suffering.*

~ THE AWAKENING ~

... A Brief Retelling Of The Buddha



Once upon in sixth century BCE, there was a *Sakya* State called *Kapilavatsu*, nestled in the mountains of northeast India. Those days are now long past, and it is no longer certain whether its government was republican or oligarchic. However, it is well known that there were many ruling families that formed a *Sangh*, and they ruled in turns. The head of the current ruling family was known as the *Raja*.

Kapilavatsu used to be an independent state, before *Pasanedi*, the mighty King of *Kosala*, established his supremacy over it by waging a long and bloody war. Thereafter, it could not exercise certain sovereign powers without the sanction of King *Pasanedi*.

When our story begins, with the birth of *Siddharth Gautama*, his father *Suddhodana* was the *Raja*. *Suddhodana* was married to *Mahamaya* and her sister. He was a wealthy person with extensive lands, palaces, and a large retinue.

When *Siddharth* was conceived, *Mahamaya* had a dream and woke up with a start. The bedroom looked out to the mountains in the east. She saw a glinting sun rising over the distant cliffs, and the dark sky lightening up with golden streaks of sunlight. An exuberant *Mahamaya* told her husband about the dream. But *Suddhodana* did not reply.

That very day, *Suddhodana* held a council with the wise *Brahmins* of *Kapilavatsu*. He had waited to have an heir for a long time and was concerned after hearing about *Mahamaya*'s subtle dream.

At the council, the *Brahmins* were excited and jubilant.

The wise *Bharadwaj* prophesied, “You will have a son, who is destined to become an influential monarch, if he chooses to lead his clan. However, if he leaves his family and becomes a *sanyasi* (a sage), then he will become *Buddha*, the dispeller of human illusions.”

The other *Brahmins* also agreed with the prophecy whole-heartedly.

Rumors about the prophecy soon spread far and wide, like a wildfire in a dry summer, and reached distant lands. Rejoicing over the birth of her child, *Mahamaya* suddenly became ill and passed away.

At the age of eight, the lonely prince started his education. The *Brahmins*, who had predicted his future, were his first teachers. He learned the techniques of concentration and meditation from *Bharadwaj*. He also acquired skills in archery and other weapons.

Siddharth excelled both in his lessons and military training. However, he was more inclined towards meditation and was compassionate to every living being. He refused to go hunting, causing great alarm to his family, especially his father. Instead, *Siddharth* preferred to roam about the streets of *Kapilavatsu* and was deeply affected by poverty, disease and sorrow.

Siddharth loved to seek the company of ascetics and spent time with them discussing their wanderings. This made *Suddhodana* scared of his son’s prophecy. He attempted to keep *Siddharth* engrossed with the carnal pleasures of life. He built three luxurious palaces, each with a harem of beautiful girls, for his son. However, *Siddharth* always exercised self-control and showed no interest in women.

After coming of age, *Sidhharth* was coaxed by his father to attend the *swayamvara* of *Yeshodhara*, daughter of *Dandapani*, who was a prominent member of the *Sakya Sangh*.

According to ancient customs, a *swayamvara* is an event where the bride either chooses her groom from the attendees or she marries the winner of a competition held in her honour.

All eligible bachelors of *Kapilavatsu*, as well as from neighbouring states, were invited to attend the *swayamvara*. *Siddharth* also received an invitation.

Suddhodana believed that a matrimonial alliance with the rich and powerful *Dandapani* will further cement his political clout. Although reluctant at first, *Siddharth* finally gave in to the demands of his father.

Among the many men who attended the *swayamvara*, *Yeshodhara* chose *Sidhharth* at first sight. But *Dandapani* was not pleased with his daughter's choice. He had heard of *Siddharth*'s prophecy and had doubts whether he would make a responsible husband. Nonetheless, he knew his daughter was determined and had already made up her mind to marry *Siddharth*.

Dandapani reluctantly announced his daughter's choice. The other suitors felt insulted, and refused to accept it. Instead, they unanimously demanded an archery competition to win her hand, to which *Dandapani* was only too happy to agree.

Going back to *Yeshodhara*, he said, “I can’t disregard the demand of all your suitors. After all, a competition is usually the norm at a *swayamvara*.”

He knew that his daughter would not go against his decision in public. However, *Yeshodhara* maintained a stoic silence.

But to *Dandapani*’s immense surprise (and *Yeshodhara*’s pleasure), *Siddharth* easily defeated everyone in the competition with his superior marksmanship.

Dandapani was stumped that his carefully crafted ploy had failed miserably. Meanwhile, *Yeshodhara* could not stop smiling.

2

Eight years passed peacefully. *Siddharth* and *Yeshodhara* had a son named *Rahul*. *Suddhodana* was pleased that his son had settled into peaceful domestic bliss.

About this time, the *Sakya Sangh* declared war on the neighbouring State of *Koliyas*, due to disputes over the use of the water from the river *Rohini*.

Siddharth was always against violence and strongly opposed the decision. The *Sangh*, in turn, retaliated by threatening a social boycott of his family and conspired to confiscate their lands. *Siddharth* was forced to become a *Parivrajaka* and to leave the country. The *Sangh*,

in return, agreed to withdraw their hostility towards his family. They also postponed their plan to attack the *Koliyas*. They feared that if King *Pasanedi* found out the reason behind *Siddharth's* exile, he may interfere undesirably in the matter.

It was the start of the monsoon and the sky was overcast. As the sun was going down and a cool evening breeze faded into soft twilight, *Siddharth* walked away from *Kapilvastu*, under the early stars.

Siddharth undertook an arduous journey to *Rajagraha*. This vibrant capital of *Magadha* was surrounded by five hills and was a melting pot of various philosophies and ideas. He put up a small hut at the foot of *Pandava* hill for his sojourn.

Siddharth forged friendships with five other *parivrajakas*, who were his neighbours. He learned from them that there has been a great agitation among the *Sakyas* against going to war. There were demonstrations and processions by men, women, and children. The *Sangh* had to reconvene and reconsider their decision. This time, the majority agreed to compromise and to negotiate with the *Koliyas*. Envoys of both States met and appointed a council, with the authority to settle all disputes regarding sharing of water from the river *Rohini*.

Siddharth was pleased that the war had been averted. However, he decided to continue with his new way of life. He left *Rajagraha* and went to meet *Muni Arada Kalam*, who taught him the technique of

Samadhi, consisting of seven stages. Siddharth practised every day and became an expert.

Siddharth also went to *Yogi Uddakka Ramaputta*, who knew a technique which enabled a *dhyani* to go one stage higher. And with dedication, he mastered this eighth stage of *Samadhi*.

Siddharth travelled to the town of *Gaya*, and fixed his habitation in *Uruvela*, where he endured severe austerities for six long years.

One day, while he was meditating, a young girl named *Sujata* offered him a bowl of rice. *Siddharth* was emaciated due to self-imposed starvation. Looking at her concerned eyes, he realised that deprivation from food, water, and sleep was not a way to liberation. He accepted *Sujata*'s offering and ended his trial of asceticism.

Hoping to make a breakthrough, *Siddharth* left *Uruvela* and saw a *bodhi* tree beside the road to *Gaya*. He sat under it and began to meditate. After four weeks of *Samadhi*, he realized that it would be selfish of him to keep meditating and let things remain as they were.

He wandered from one place to another, and found many disciples among eminent noble families and sages. In between spreading his philosophical ideas, *Buddha* revisited his homeland and met his family again.

Although he resisted at first, he later allowed women to become *Bhikkus* too. Soon, *Yeshodhara* and thousands of *Sakya* women joined his *Sangh*. *Buddha*'s profound teachings also caught the imagination of vagabonds, murderers, bandits, criminals and other outcasts of society.

Buddha also gave refuge to barbers, sweepers, untouchables, other low castes and lepers; indoctrinating them into the ranks of his ever-increasing band of *Bhikkus*.

Buddha spent the rest of his life preaching his philosophy, before he died of old age at 80. However, he refused to appoint his successor, even on his deathbed. He believed that his ideas had to survive based on its principles.

Today, 2500 years later, Buddhism remains a dominant philosophy in the world. And in a world still torn apart by geopolitical and racial conflicts, *Buddha's* ideology remains more relevant than ever before.

~

PART III - SET IN STONES

SET IN STONES

An Adventure Story ... Inspired By True Events



Adhi Agus Oktaviana was stunned.

The light from his torch casted long shadows that twisted and arched through the intricate passage; and reflected back from the stone wall.

Adhi had rushed ahead with the usual excitement he feels during an expedition, and the rest of the survey team were far behind. He was now standing in an open space deep inside *Leang Tedongnge*, the limestone cave that their host in the nearby village had told them about.

“It is called the cave of the buffalo. It remains half-drowned during the monsoon and the villagers then keep their water buffaloes there”, Muin had said last night, sipping his *ballo*; the exquisite, local palm wine that was offered to his guests, for an exorbitant price.

The *ballo* tasted sublime with the *busaras* (rice cakes), as the warmth from the camp fire brushed Adhi’s cold fingers. A clear, starlit winter sky was hanging over the silent village.

The team of archeologists had trekked through the deep jungles of Sulawesi for several days to get here, across rickety bamboo bridges and paddy fields.

“We don’t get many visitors here, and no westerners ever!” Muin had added.

This small community of indigenous *Bugi* peasants lived a secluded life, despite being a stone’s throw away from the buzzing city of Makassar. There is no road to this valley. Nestled within the mountainous terrain of tropical rainforests and surrounded with resplendent beauty, this serene village is only accessible on foot. Coming here felt like taking a step back to pristine time.

“*Perhaps a lot more than just a step*”, thought Adhi now, as he stood transfixed and gazed at the stone wall.

In the middle of it, was an ancient cave painting.

Adhi had been intrigued by pre-historic rock art, ever since he trained in archeology at the University. His thesis on *motifs of Indonesian cave paintings* opened fascinating new windows to the lives of early humans in this region. After graduation, he joined the National Archeological Research Center at Jakarta, working as a researcher. It has been several years on the job. Yet, viewing a newly discovered cave painting still thrilled him to the bone.

He approached the artwork to observe it closely.

On the left of the panel, was a life-size suid - Sulawesi's endemic short-legged pig with characteristic facial warts, painted with dark purplish ochre. Beside it were two well-preserved human handprints.

The rest of the scene was composed with two or three more suids; only partially visible due to exfoliation of the cave wall canvas. The heads of two suids were still distinguishable and the animals stood confronting each other in formidable postures. The entire composition seemed to portray an episode of social interaction between the suids - perhaps a confrontation.

Adhi was aware of the two distinct styles of rock art he has found in numerous caves and shelters in Sulawesi. He realized instinctively that this marvelous cave painting was from the *Paleolithic* antiquity; and did not postdate the *Neolithic* revolution.

Earlier this month, he had discovered another intriguing mural inside a cave called *Leang Bulu Sipong 4*, that depicted a story of several part-human, part-animal figures (*therianthropes*) hunting wild buffalos and anoas with ropes and spears - a narrative fiction with striking visual imagery. Adhi believed it must have been be part of some primordial folklore or religious myth; representing some spiritual belief of Sulawesi's early ancestors.

Adhi knew he was fortunate to find two such thematically distinct magnificent cave paintings in such a short span of time.



1. The mural inside Leang Bulu Sipong 4 cave in Sulawesi, depicting a gigantic buffalo being hunted by imaginary creatures.

These discoveries happened in 2017.

Later, U-series dating estimated the minimum age of the rock arts found at *Leang Tedongnge* and *Leang Bulu Sipong 4* to be 45,500 and 43,900 years old, respectively. They are now, the earliest known figurative artwork and graphical record of human storytelling in the world.

When published, these findings caused a fair bit of stir in the scientific community. Previously, the *Upper Paleolithic* cave art in Europe was known to host the oldest images, such as an abstract disc sign at the site of El Castillo in Spain, dating back to 40,800 years.

Furthermore, the mural at *Leang Bulu Sipong 4* suggests that the first indications of conceiving non-real entities (such as *therianthropes*), also does not come from Europe, as has been assumed for long. Instead,

the ability to invent fictional stories, which is likely to be the last and most crucial stage in the evolution of human cognition, had occurred in Sulawesi at least 43,900 years ago!

Moreover, these ancient cave paintings are vital keys for solving the puzzle of the first Australian settlements. Scientific evidences indicate that anatomically modern humans were living in Australia about 65,000 years ago, and in Southeast Asia about 70,000 years ago. The large Sulawesi Island in Wallacea, may have been a *stop* during the first transoceanic migration of *Homo sapiens* by watercraft, which eventually landed them in the western tip of New Guinea.

If this hypothesis is true, then our species may have reached Sulawesi sometime between 70,000 to 65,000 years ago.

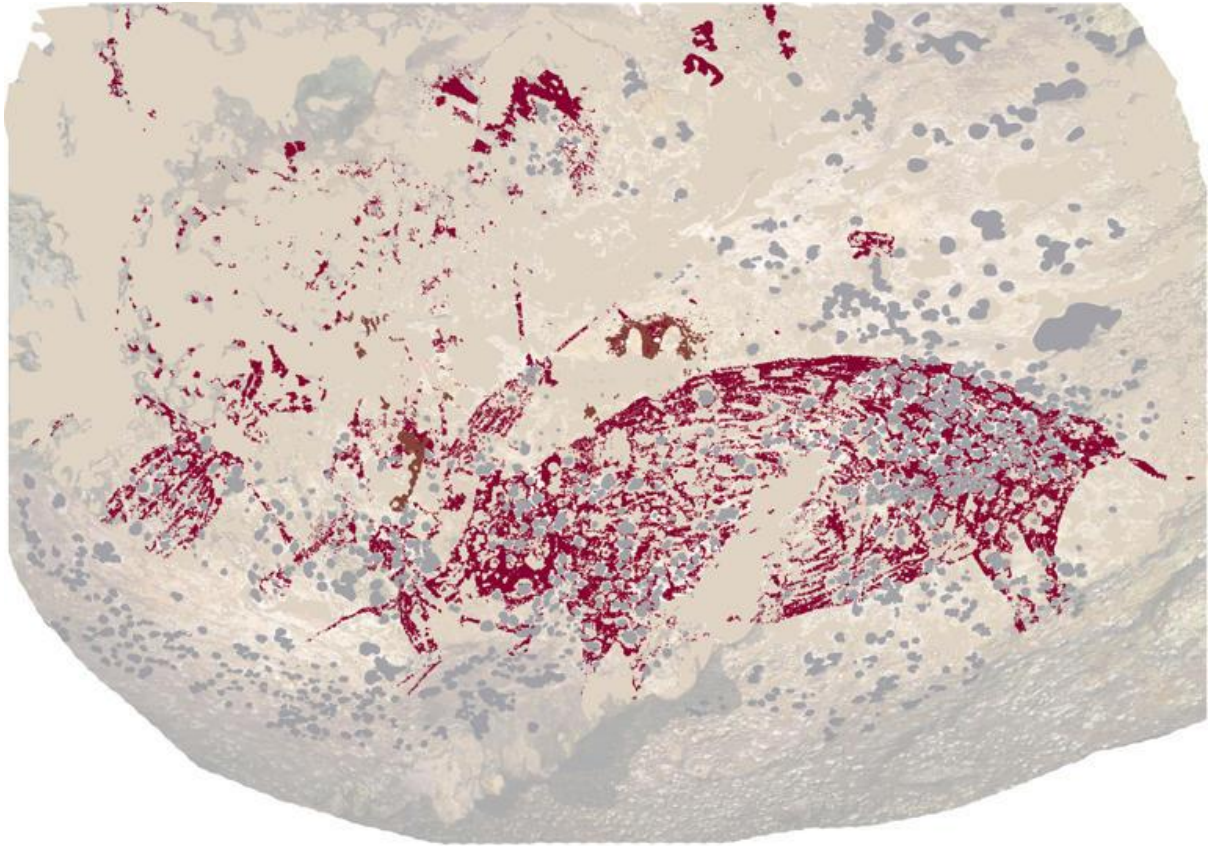
Archeologists now dream of uncovering much older rock art in Sulawesi or other Wallacean islands, which may date back 65,000 years ago, if not earlier. That may provide us the final missing link for man's first journey to Australia.

Recently, in 2023, Adhi led a team that discovered a figurative artwork on the ceiling of the limestone cave called *Leang Karampuang* in Maros-Pangkep region of South Sulawesi province, which is now the world's oldest known imaginative and visual story-telling – created at least 51,200 years ago.

The narrative scene is dominated by a pig standing upright among three smaller human-like figures, and is painted in a single shade of dark red ochre.

The rock art has been dated using a novel technique called *laser ablation U-series* to date the miniscule layers of calcium carbonate crystals that are naturally formed on top of cave paintings. This revolutionary dating method has reassessed the age of the painting at

Leang Bulu Sipong 4 to be at least 48,000 years old, upwards of 4000 years than previously estimated.



2. 51,200-year-old representative cave art discovered in 2024 at *Leang Karampuang* cave in South Sulawesi.

~ THE END ~