

Cycles
A Cut Through Time
(Book One)

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Cycles

A Cut through Time

Michelle E. Lowe



North Olca

Gavia

Ebrus Continent

Glazlands

Isles of Kaycaster

Notca Waterway

Notca Waterway

South Olca

Lake Luketowan

Encan

Lugina

Geness Jungle

Pulkan-ja Forest

Pulkan-ja Forest

Valley of Coos

Dead Hill

Agor Trail

Shipping City

Gitia

Wakana

San Sa-Tai

Shan-Orat



Adak was once a beautiful, thriving world until the final cycle came and destroyed it all. Altered by the festering magic that transformed rivers into sludge and fertile soil into ash, no part of the planet was spared from destruction—not the sky that was previously blue and was turned to a sickly green, or the oceans once teeming with aquatic life but now left as large vats of oily liquid. Even the outer planes seemed affected, for the stars no longer shone as though they had been snuffed out, one by one. The sun became a cold speck, distant and wary of the world upon which it once provided its warmth and light.

All life that hadn't perished during the cycle was sentenced to entreat pain and mutation for the dark magic to mock as it slithered across the globe, relishing in what it had achieved when it finally ate away the world once and for all.

Not many structures stood any longer. Towns, villages, and cities had crumbled to ruins long ago. Anything remaining could only be described as skeletal forms of decay. And yet, on a spot of harsh land, where the terrain was nothing more than jagged volcanic rock overlooking the black sheen of the ocean, rested a small dwelling constructed from the earth by a pair of bleeding hands. Within this aboveground cave house sat the last fighter who failed to keep the cycle from coming.

Draven scribbled in a makeshift book he put together with scraps of parchment, thin cuts of wood that hadn't burned and leaves he had plucked before all the trees disintegrated to dust. With no ink to use, he had resorted to using his own blood.

Hardly a stitch of clothing covered him nowadays. Worn away by time and harsh living, the cold nights would have rendered him insane if he wasn't already. After all, here he was, writing instructions on how to reconstruct a civilization that would never be again.

The swelling in his hands throbbed daily, as did his gnarled fingers that barely grasped anything, much less the slender stem of a quill. The shabby thing was from a bird he killed for food. His last meal. Still, he wrote in his crude tome, pushing through the aches and pains and ignoring the pus oozing from the many blisters covering his near-naked body.

His only companions rested on the planks that made up his desk. Three skulls that once belonged to his friends and fellow warriors. Three skulls—one, Leilatha, he thought it was—was half broken. They were supposed to be immortal. That was the deal when they signed up to battle the dark magic. But they all died, consumed by the very enemy that currently fasted in Draven. Soon enough, it would overtake him just like the others.

But for now, he sat and he wrote and illustrated as he had done to help the next population evolve and rebuild what was lost before the cycle eliminated nearly everything.

Holding onto the slightest hope that someday someone would use the knowledge to replenish the world and restore it to what it was before, Draven scribbled his words and images in his blood.



The Discovery

“We’ve yet to lose so long as we have a piece of you imprisoned! Without you being whole, you cannot lay waste to this planet! No more cycles!”

“No more cycles!”

“What are you doing? You must say the—”

“It didn’t work!”

“What have you done? You’ve killed us all!”

What they found during the cave’s exploration invited the worldwide threat to start all over again.

Tok and his small team discovered the cave days earlier after encountering a massive sinkhole. Using rope, each of them scaled down one at a time, and once they’d reached the bottom, they found a cavern teeming with life.

Animals and plants—usually found above ground—had been surviving in the darkness. Thick, damp moss covered the ground, with tiny colorless flowers sprouting from it. The community of underground living things continued well into the depths of the grotto. Water crystals had formed over the walls and ceiling, creating a tile effect that shimmered when any light touched it. These kinds of crystal formations usually developed exclusively in caves where there was a copious amount of moisture and the humidity was so high that spelunkers could drown in their own air, their lungs liquefying. And yet, this cave carried no such threat, which confused Tok.

Shallow pools filled with glimmering blue water dotted the rocky floor. Tok recognized the glowing phenomenon as reef pods. When the pods reached maturity, they’d burst open, expelling illumination seeds that would eventually plant themselves in the seabed and grow into coral.

Tok knelt by a pool and dipped his hand in.

“Freshwater,” he muttered after drawing his fingers out of his mouth.

Of course it had to be fresh water. They were miles from the nearest shore. There was no coral in sight, either. Perhaps the glow was coming from something else entirely. Tok couldn’t be sure, though.

Despite the gleaming puddles, they kept their lanterns lit.

The tunnel was cool and sweet smelling, and a strange energy in the air made all the hairs on Tok’s body stand on end. The underground rodents and the abundance of edible

plant life offered the explorers a reliable food source. This blessing allowed them to remain inside the cavern by helping them to save their rations.

Tok and his company were of the Pudicus race, who, aside from their hoggish noses that granted them a strong sense of smell, looked similar to the Apex.

There were several races of sapiens, with the Apex being the dominant in each population. Each subspecies had distinctive features. Over a thousand seasons ago, there was a war between all races. The conflict nearly eliminated the Esins tribe. Nowadays, those wild sapiens mostly lived in communities distant from any known civilization.

“How far do you think this tunnel goes?” asked Riniya. “We’ve been exploring for two days.”

“We’ll find out eventually,” Tok answered her. “It’s the most unique area we’ve ever seen, that’s for sure.”

Tok glanced over his shoulder to see Riniya, Kabbal, and Floy trailing behind. Each was driven by curiosity to seek hidden wonders all over the world of Adak. They even sold a lot of what they uncovered to continue their never-ending quest for discovery.

“Up ahead,” Kabbal said excitedly. “Look!”

The cave tunnel had finally opened into a vast chamber. It was almost like stepping into an underground mansion. The moss and dull flowers continued to pad the floor. Rodents bounced around in all directions on their long hind legs, the light catching in their reflective eyes. More glowing pools appeared, only deeper and wider than the puddles in the channel. Massive stalactites hung from the tall roof. Some had touched down and became columns.

“There are statues over there,” Floy announced.

Across the way were four ten-foot-tall figures carved from sodalite. The various blues, whites, and blacks swirled like frozen winds all over them.

On their way through the forest, Tok had spotted many sodalite stones, some the size of boulders. Some took on a square shape as though they’d been chiseled to make huge bricks. He had found clusters of these colorful stones the closer they came to the cave.

Each statue sat cross-legged with hands upon their bent knees, their backs facing each other. Vines had grown and wrapped around them. Peering from between the vines were markings on their arms, sides, and legs. The designs appeared tribal, but nothing Tok had ever seen inked on any clan he’d encountered.

He approached while sniffing. His snout-like nose twitched as it tried to detect some sort of scent. It didn’t.

Embedded in each of the statue’s chests were uncut stones the size of coconuts. They were jagged jewels in deep blue, emerald, and crimson.

“Could this cavern be an ancient civilization?” Riniya spoke up.

Tok pondered that as he stopped in front of the sculptures. “It is possible. However, where is everything else? This is the only artificial thing here.”

Kabbal pointed to an uncut stone. “Should we take them?”

Tok slipped off the straps of his rucksack and climbed onto the leg of a figure, grabbing

a vine to steady himself. “They would make good trinkets to sell later on.”

Tok withdrew his knife and dug the tip into the sliver of space between the statue and the crystal. Since he didn’t expect to gain any profit from the stone, he was crude in his excavation. Sprinkles of granite fell as he attempted to pop the thing out by jabbing the blade in and twisting it before pushing against the handle. The crystal was wedged in so tight that Tok wondered if it was part of the sculpture itself. Then the knife caught perfectly, making the gem shift. His skin rippled with the energy of excitement.

I got it!

The object moved again. With a final yank, a crack sounded.

“I almost have it!” Kabbal exclaimed happily, still working on prying out his own keepsake.

Tok chewed his bottom lip as he kept pushing into the handle. A gentle rumble vibrated throughout the grand chamber. Tok, too engrossed in his quest to obtain the artifact, failed to notice it immediately. With another loud crack, the gem came loose and Tok grabbed hold and plucked the stone out of its former home. It weighed heavy in his hand.

A second violent shake nearly caused him to lose his footing.

“It’s a land shake!” Riniya yelled in a panic.

Tok held onto the ivy, hurrying to shove the stone into the satchel strapped around him, when a more powerful tremor forced him to let it go so to grab the vines with both hands. The entire place rocked madly, setting loose sections of the cave ceiling. Clumps of rocks fell and landed hard, contributing to the jolting.

Floy screamed, but his cries were short-lived when falling rubble crushed him. The shaking stole Tok’s grip on the vine, knocking him off. Once he hit the ground, he eyed the gem nearby. The rocky foundation cracked, and the jewel teetered on the edge of a quickly expanding opening.

A faint glow materialized inside the stone and then dispersed into tiny dots of light. A couple of speckles shot off like shooting stars. It appeared to be a whole universe inside the stone.

The stone dropped—on its way to being lost forever. Then it wasn’t. Tok seized it and pulled it safely away from the pit. He drew it toward him and pressed it against his chest. A warm comfort coursed through him. The tranquil feeling came from the stone itself. But, how?

The quake intensified, causing Tok to bounce a few times. A huge piece of ceiling dropped directly on the statues, breaking them apart. Huge, severed pieces became entangled with the clinging creeper vines. Chunks of rock continued to collapse, smashing into what remained of the four figures.

Tok held so much confidence that he wouldn’t be harmed that he didn’t even shut his eyes. Instead, he watched what felt like the entire world ending. Large stones rolled around him. Some of it was parts of the statues themselves. Falling boulders blotted out the minimal lighting from the pools of water, and soon, all went dark.

* * *

After the darkness took over, the chaos subsided.

When everything was still, Tok rose and groped the air for his rucksack when Kabbal yelled. "Tok!"

"I'm coming," Tok called back. "Hold on."

He found his pack and rummaged through it until he found his other lantern and a box of firestones. He scraped them together until one of the stones ignited. Once the firestone lit, he set it inside the lantern.

With the light to guide him, he climbed over the rubble. "Kabbal! Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, but Riniya is hurt."

When Tok reached them, he saw Riniya's leg caught under a rock. Kabbal's head was also bleeding, and he had cuts on his face. It seemed only Tok had been spared any damage.

Tok's heart sank when Kabbal asked, "Where is Floy?"

Unable to even say Floy had died, Tok only shook his head and gave a crestfallen sigh.

With Tok's help, he and Kabbal lifted the heavy boulder enough for Riniya to slip her leg out. Once freed, it was apparent she wouldn't be able to walk on her own. Her entire blood-drenched calf had shards of bone sticking out from where it had been crushed. Riniya was barely conscious, which, considering the extent of her wounds, was a blessing.

Tok and Kabbal patched her up the best they could, fastened her leg into a makeshift splint, and made a stretcher out of Tok's bedroll. Together, they carried Riniya away. Tok only hoped the cave shaft had remained accessible.

"It amazes me that you have not even a scratch on you," Kabbal commended.

"Yes," he agreed, glancing at the satchel where the stone was stored.

* * *

Two days after the stone was gone, someone woke up.