# The Land of the Ostriches

Moriamo A. Onabanjo

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ISBN-10: 1519501951 ISBN-13: 978-1519501950 This book is dedicated to my source, my inspiration,
Jehovah.

And also to my babies,
Oluwatomini Onabanjo
Oluwatomisin Onabanjo
Oluwasemilewa Onabanjo
Oluwasemilore Onabanjo

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# Summary:

Once upon a time in a remote place at the far ends of the earth, is a place so beautiful it is beyond description. Ostriches so dazzling in their beauty occupy this place. Together, this place and the ostriches are the embodiment of beauty and perfection. One day the situation changes when the ostriches make a horrific discovery. In there midst is an "ugly duckling". This misfit is immediately banished from their midst however it does not stop the process of decline. Soon their once perfect habitat is run down, unliveable, shabby and their existence is in danger. What will they do?

# Author's short biography:

Moriamo Onabanjo was born in Plainfield New Jersey. Her family moved to Nigeria when she was a toddler, where she spent the next 30 years. She studied architecture at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria and Creative Writing at the Full Sail University, Florida.

She currently lives in Las Vegas. For more information visit her website at: <a href="Moriamo">Moriamo</a> Onabanjo

# Akurithere

There is a place where the sun shines daily, where the trees are lush and green, the waters sparkling blue and the sweet melody of birds in the trees echoes throughout the land. The air is pure and crisp; breathing it in brings a cleansing freshness. A place so beautiful, the word "beauty" is understated. It is the land of Akurithere, the land of the Ostriches.

Rising from its centre, like a raging crescendo is the sound of music. It charges the atmosphere with sweet melody and joy. Zooming in to its source, we realize in astonishment, it is a large gathering of ostriches. They are adorned with brilliant white feathers, which have no spot or blemish. Standing side by side, there bodies a swaying blur of white as they dance in tune to the music. Moving and swaying in unison; heads and beaks held high; regal, majestic and poise; they exhibit the magnificence of their design.

A splendid sight to behold, as the flight of birds in the sky swarm to the music, and the sun shines with a smile on its face. The flowers release a sweet fragrance, as all creation joins the ostriches in a joyous celebration. It is the early morning festival of life in the land of Akurithere.

After such a melodious celebration, they break up into groups, some strut to the clear still pool to drink, while others move to the bathing area. They bathe in groups and each time a group leaves the pool, the water replenishes and refreshes itself. Bathing in the radiant pool makes their feathers glisten and shine.

Once bathed, it is time for the early morning meal. A large table is set before them filled with the most delicious things. Fruits from the gardens, fish from the rivers and a lot of good things. At the end of the table is a throne where the King of the ostriches sits. It has remained unoccupied since the death of the last King. The conditions necessary for

electing a new king have not been met, so the temporary leader is Marik, the former assistant of the last King.

Marik in a loud voice recites some few words to their creator while they all stand around the table. When he is done they sit and eat.

In the band of ostriches is a clan of youths whose leader is Kuon. This group includes Amun, Spul, Kwan and Pero the youngest. They meet each day after the meal before going to their various assignments. Playing, joshing around, teasing and ragging each other, they clamour noisily, but Pero the youngest is unusually quiet. Kuon the leader notices and after the others leave; he pulls Pero aside to ask him what the problem is. You see Pero lives with his parents outside the assembly area just like everyone else. The king is the only one who lives within. Pero is an only child and his parents are old and aged. He is always nearby to help them in

their old age. Kuon assumes his parents have taken ill and Pero is worried.

"What's the matter Pero? You are not your usual self today."

Pero nods. "I have a lot on my mind."
"What is wrong?" Kuon asks.

Pero pauses and looks around. "Have you noticed anything unusual?"

Kuon with a frown says, "No I haven't.
What are you talking about?"

Pero pulls him towards a bush and whispers. "It's my feathers."

In alarm Kuon looks down at Pero's feathers. Circling Pero he nudges his feathers with his beak. Dismayed Pero pushes Kuon away. "Not so obvious. I don't want anyone to know."

"Know what?" Kuon asks mystified.

Pero says in a whisper, "You see I noticed recently that my feathers are falling away and they are not being replaced with new ones."

Kuon in horror steps back. "What?" He exclaims. "Are you sure? Are you ill? Have you gone to see Muba for help and advice?"

Pero nods, "I have done all that but Muba declares that I am as fit as a fiddle. I don't understand why it's happening. Each morning before I come to the assembly I re-arrange my feathers to cover the bald areas. I don't know how long I can keep this up."

Kuon shaking his head says, "It's never happened before. Let me see your feathers again."

As he and Pero view the balding areas, in the forest behind them is Lomb the evil one. Laughing wickedly, he rubs his hands together with glee. This is one secret he intends to use against Kuon. Something he dreamt of doing for a long time.

# Banished

The next day as soon as the ostriches are done celebrating, Marik in a loud voice announces, "It seems we have an oddity in our midst. This person knows himself and should come out immediately."

When no one moves Marik proceeds, "It will be worse if we have to weed out the fellow."

Concerned, everyone turns, to see who this could be. When no one comes out, Marik waves his feathered wings and the legion of army standing by march towards the ostriches. One by one they begin ruffling the feathers of those present.

"Hey stop that, you can't does this."
Many cried out in outrage.

"You are ruffling my feathers. I have to go back and take another wash to make it perfect." Those present exclaimed.

The Legion with complete disregard to their cries continues with the inspection.

Finally with a loud cry the leader of the legion says. "We have found him."

Marching between them is Pero. Soon they reveal the balding patches where the feathers have dropped off. In revulsion the ostriches turn away from him. Marik, in agreement with the leaders of each clan, banishes Pero from Akurithere. He is driven away and made to live in the forest all his days. Kuon, in tears, follows Pero asserting his innocence. "Pero I never told them what we discussed you have to believe me."

Pero nods. "I know that but how did they find out?"

Soon they realize that Lomb the evil one is behind this.

"He must have been in the forest and overheard all we said." Kuon tells Pero.

Kuon seeks Lomb out and gives him a piece of his mind. Lomb laughs all the way knowing that his mission has been accomplished.

Pero through Kuon goes to all the leaders asking for their help. This exercise proves

futile and unprofitable. The leaders will not allow Pero back into the fold in his state of imperfection. Defeated Pero lives his life all alone in the forest. Very soon his feathers disappear and he becomes bald,

Those who see him laugh and jeer at him.

Kuon is the only one who takes the time to

meet him late at night. He sits with him as

he moans and laments.

# Tragedy

Pero moves farther into the forest as his feathers fall away. His naked body is an embarrassment. Unknown to him, Lomb once again is following him everywhere he goes. When he discovers that Pero has lost all of his feathers, he organizes a group of his friends to follow him into the forest on the pretext of sympathising with him. However unknown to Pero, Limo together with his friends stage another embarrassment. This time they go too far and Pero is left with welts and bruises on his bare body.

While he is recovering from this ordeal, another tragedy befalls Pero, his mother dies, and his father follows shortly after.

Distressed, Pero wanders the forest seeking solace.

He often wondered how they were doing, but Kuon assured him, they were being taken care of. To now hear of their death was too

much for Pero. It is not long afterwards that he takes to wandering the forest for months.

One day, while he is drawing near the settlement of the ostriches, he notices a bright light at the far end of the forest. Curious, he walks towards the light. As he pushes through the bushes, he comes to a place he has never seen before. In front of him is a clear glistering pool, a table spread with delicious and mouth-watering food. He looks around and finds no one. Tentatively he walks towards the pool, when he is sure no one is around, he dives into the pool. The invigorating soothing pool heals him physically and emotionally. Feeling completely refreshed he walks towards the table, sits and eats. When he is full and satisfied he notices there is only one chair at the table and he is sitting on it. Wondering if this is a ploy by his friend Kuon, he begins to call out.

"Kuon, Kuon are you there? Did you do this? You sure are the best friend anyone can have. Kuon you old friend come on out."

Suddenly a rustling sound causes him to turn around. Seeing no one he wonders if he imagined it, but soon he feels the presence of someone. Scared he begins to backpedal. "Who is there? Who is it?"

Gradually he feels the person speak to him though he cannot hear him. Baffled at such a strange occurrence, he listens attentively and finds that he can reply the same way, with his heart.

Am I loosing my mind? Has all these tragedies unhinged my mind? How can this be? Pero wonders. Lost in the beauty of the voice speaking to him he does not realize how late it is. Kuon will be waiting at the outskirts of the forest. He needed to go or Kuon would be worried sick. As he leaves, he looks back. He wants to make sure he can remember the location so that he can come back later. It is then; he sees the little hut at the far end of the exquisite settlement. Curious, he walks towards the hut and finds it's a place for him to rest. Astonished, he wonders who would do

such a wonderful thing. He looks around the hut hoping to see the belongings of the person who owns it but finds none. The hut is furnished with furniture but there are no personal items in it. Finally, he shuts the door and leaves the settlement to meet Kuon.

# **Kuon Visits**

Kuon seeing Pero rushes towards him with wings stretched out to hug him.

"How are you?" Kuon asks Pero.

Pero replies, "I am fine. I am sorry I got you worried. Hearing of the death of my parents was too much to bear. I had to leave. I roamed around for a long time. I was so close to losing my mind." Pero apologizes.

Turning to Kuon he asks, "How are you doing?"

Kuon replies, "I am doing well. You know
Spul and Kwan have gotten babies."

"No I didn't." Pero exclaims, "That's wonderful news to hear. I had no idea they were married. When did they get married?"

Kuon replies, "Shortly after the death of your parents, when you left for the forest.

Not long afterwards their babies came."

"Well," Pero says with a laugh "I am so happy for them."

Kuon pauses and does not reply
immediately, "I am sure you are wondering why

they have not come to visit you yet. It's just that they are so afraid of the elders and with their kids coming along, they fear being banished from their loved ones."

Pero however soothes Kuon's troubling thoughts by letting him know he understands and thanks him for coming to see him all these years.

Finally Kuon notices that his friend looks different even though he is still without feathers. "You look different Pero. Somehow you are refreshed and at peace."

Pero nods, "Yes, my time in the forest helped me to come to terms with the situation and I have a peace that keeps me going."

He was unwilling to share with his best friend his discovery. However he needed to know if the location of his secret place was common knowledge so he asks Kuon casually without drawing any attention to it. "Have you any idea if there are other settlements outside of ours in the forest?"

Kuon looks up with a frown, "No, not that
I know of. Why are you asking?"

Pero shrugs, "Oh nothing really, it just that being outside these boundaries I wondered if we were the only ones who lived in these parts or if there were others who we don't know about."

Kuon ponders, "That's a question you have to ask the elders. I am not sure there is anyone living within these parts, but it sure would be welcoming to have some neighbours."

"Yes it would," Pero agrees.

"There is something else I want to talk to you about" Kuon speaks hesitantly.

"What is it Kuon? You sound as if it is ominous. What has happened again?" Pero asks wondering if he can bear any more pain.

"It's about Adel." Kuon finally says.

Immediately Pero freezes where he stands. Turning slowly he looks at Kuon.

"What did you say?" He whispers

Kuon belligerently continues. "It's about
Adel."

"I told you never to mention her name."

Pero shouts. "I never want to hear about her."

"Pero you need to listen to this." Kuon pleads.

"What do you want to tell me; that she is married. Is that what you want to say?" Pero yells.

Angry and frustrated he runs away despite Kuon's shouts for him to stop. He runs wildly thrashing through the bushes like a man possessed. He runs until he can no longer run.

# **Ku-Son**

Finally spent, Pero crumples to a heap on the floor of the forest. Weeping loudly, his chest heaving as sobs racked his body. Pero wonders if his heart can take anymore as the pain pierces through him. Bent double, he cries the more as his agony becomes unbearable. He had loved Adel with everything he was capable of; to be rejected in his hour of need was tantamount to a betrayal nothing could erase. As he weeps, loneliness like a cloak wraps itself around his heart and squeezes what remains of his strength. Pero falls limp onto the forest floor. All the refreshing vigour he received coming back from his trip, was before him, a puddle. Nothing was left. How was he ever going to survive seeing Adel with someone else? He did not think he had the strength to live through that experience. As he groans in anguish a shadow suddenly falls upon him. In a voice filled with pain he admonishes Kuon "Kuon Please

leave me alone. I told you I don't want to
hear anything about her. Just leave me alone."

Suddenly he feels a hand upon his shoulders and his wrung heart is buoyed with strength.

But how could that be? Looking up from the floor, his eyes behold an ostrich covered with a dazzling and brilliant light. He smiles down at him. Rising up Pero asks, "Who are you?"

The brilliantly lit ostrich replies, "I am the owner of the place you ate and drank. I am here to strengthen you and show you the way back. Go and listen to what Kuon has to say."

Rising up he walks back to where Kuon is sitting perplexed and worried.

Pero asks Kuon, "What were you going to say about Adel?"

Giving him a puzzled look and weighing his words, he pleads. "Adel is sorry she left when you needed her the most. She wants to come back and asked me to speak with you."

"Oh yes? Why now?" Pero asks sardonically.

"Did she suddenly realize what she did?

Pero stops short. "Oh let me guess. The guy

she went away with suddenly dumped her." Pero

looks at Kuon as if the answers are written on

his forehead.

Kuon moving from one foot to another replies, "Well in a way you are right. She found out that Shap had been seeing someone else behind her back."

Pero huffs and moves away from Kuon, looking like he is about to flee again. "I knew there was something fishy going on."

Kuon pleads with Pero. "When she found out, she broke it off with him. She realizes she made a mistake and asked me to come and speak with you."

Kuon turns around and looks at his friend, "Well tell her I have nothing to say to her and I certainly do not want to speak to her." With that he matches away into the forest.

## Secret Place

Pero swims in the pool of the secret place he found. Satisfaction wraps itself around him like the water of the pool he swims in. Joy feels his heart as he notices that his feathers are beginning to fan out. This time the feathers are so beautiful, better than any he has ever seen. Instead of white feathers these are white spiked with gold, which gleam when the sunrays hit them. He has not revealed this to anyone and most especially to Kuon, his best friend. He needed to make sure these feathers were here to stay before alerting his friend. So, anytime he met Kuon, he had a light covering wrapped around him. He explains that it is a barrier that keeps the burning glare of the sun from his bare skin. Kuon believes and never questions it. He had seen the blisters on his bare body before.

He had not seen Kuon since the fateful day he walked out on him. The day he rejected Adel's overtures to reconcile with him. The

mere thought of it still rankled. To her credit Adel had made many concerted efforts to reach him but he blocked every one of her advances. Her efforts did show she was genuinely repentant. He however was not sure he could forget her rejection. He needed her desperately those first few months when he was ostracized from the community and when he lost his parents. Now when things were beginning to fall in place, she wanted him back. He did not think it would happen. Her fickleness was hard to take and made him feel raw all over with pain anytime he remembered it.

Every day, Pero thanked the invisible being who found him a place of repose from the pain of his ostracization. Each day brought new vistas, extensive possibilities and most of all healing and renewal. Freed from the pain, he now had a new purpose for his life; one he was longing to fulfil at the right time. He began to see that in essence his time of pain is indeed a time to prepare him for the next phase of his life.

As he swims in the lake, the same sense of contentment and purpose fills him once again. He looks at the settlement he discovered and sees all he has accomplished. He has built additional accommodations. It is surprising to see how far his flair for building has taken him. The discovery energizes him to build a little town.

Even though his meals are laid out each day at the exact time he still is unable to discover the person behind its preparation.

Many times he has hidden in the bushes hoping to see whoever is behind it but all to no avail. He finally gives up.

During the day he tends to the large garden and builds more homes. He is so busy during the day that when night time comes loneliness, assails him like a flood. There is no one to share it with. Kuon would fit the bill but he does not know the settlement exists. The other person he interacts with, if he could call him a person is the invisible being who guides him day and night. He speaks

with him in his heart. He has asked for his name but never received a reply. So he gave him a secret name and anytime he uses that name he feels his presence. That name is Kuson. That name conjures oneness with someone who is so much higher than he is. Someone who knows him intimately, even more than he knows himself. Someone who knows his strengths, weakness and accepts him the way he is. Before him, he is completely naked. There is nothing to hide. His every secret thoughts and desires are laid before Ku-Son. Gradually he begins to yield as Ku-Son draws him into his world. A world he never imagined in his wildest dreams. One that is so unlike his and one he is not ready to share with anyone. He wishes more than anything he can share it with Kuon but realizes that the time is not right. In his heart he knows that the time is coming when he will watch with joy as Kuon's eyes beholds the wonder and awesomeness of Ku-Son. He cannot wait for that time to come.

As he works on the next project, he begins to pick up sticks needed to build the next dwelling. Suddenly, a rustle in the bush catches his attention and he walks towards the sound. He comes to a clearing and before him sits an ostrich with magnificent glowing coloured feathers. Staring at her in wonder it seems as if he is dreaming. Looking up she smiles at him, he smiles back.

"May I ask what you are doing here?"

She smiles, "Just lying down and resting after my long trek through the bushes."

Looking around Pero asks, "Are you alone? Where are your companions?"

It sure is strange to see an ostrich all alone except if that ostrich is going through my situation. Pero thought to himself.

"Yes I am alone. I was sent away from my clan because I had too few feathers." She replies.

"But your feathers are so beautiful. Why didn't you go back?" Pero asks.

"Because it's not the same as those of my clan. Why are you also here alone?" she shot back at him.

"For the same reasons you are also here."
Pero smiles as he responds.

She looks round. "This is a beautiful place."

Standing to her feet she tentatively walks out from the bush. "Did you build all this?" "

"Yes I did, in fact I was just completing the last dwelling when I heard you behind me. Come, let me show you what I have done so far." Pero moves towards her urging her with his wing.

He shows her the little town he created and sees it through her eyes. She marvels at all he has done. Finally they get to the end of the town and rest under a shade.

"The only thing left is for it to be occupied." Pero muses aloud.

"When will that happen?" She asks.

"I have no idea." Pero says. "I leave it to the one who led me here and gave me hope when I had none."

She moves closer to him and whispers.

"You have also met him? Isn't he amazing?"

Pero is amazed that someone else besides
him knows Ku-son.

"Yes he is. What is your name?"

Smiling shyly she replies, "Kera, and what's yours?"

"It's Pero," he answers.

"Can I stay and help you build this place?" Kera asks.

Pero nods glad he finally has company.

### The secret unfolds

Pero is living a life of bliss but he also realizes he is living a lie. He has not informed Kuon his only friend about the secret settlement. Kuon still sees Pero wearing the sheathed white robe, on the pretext that his skin is sensitive to the sun. They spend time together and Kuon goes back to the commune while Pero goes to the place Ku-Son had prepared for him. Kera is still around and has turned out to be a wonderful helper. Finally married before Ku-Son they are so happy. He has many secrets from his friend and this bothers him. Kera knows Kuon. She has seen him while hiding behind the bush one day Pero went to see him.

Finally, Pero knows it is time to let Kuon know his secret. He walks through the forest path that is long ingrained in his memory. As he walks towards their regular meeting place, he wonders how he would approach the subject. Trying out several

starters he is at loss on how to tell his friend. How does one tell one's best friend that all this time he has been deceived? How would he take it? If Kuon forgave him, he would take him back to his secret place where Kera was waiting with mouth-watering meals to entertain their friend Kuon. As he approaches he sees Kuon sitting and waiting on the rock outcrop. Looking up Kuon notices Pero walking towards him sheathed in his white robe.

Standing before Kuon, Pero looks down at him. Smiling, Kuon looks up at Pero

"How are you doing Pero? It's so good to see you. I am sorry I have been away for a while. Remember I told you I had to be away. The elders sent me on an assignment."

Pero waves his wing and assures Kuon.

"Oh that's alright. You didn't tell me what the assignment was." Pero looks at Kuon questioningly.

"Well," Kuon answers looking uncomfortable. "I did not want to bother you with our problems."

"What problems are you talking about Kuon? What is going on?" Pero asks with a frown.

"Recently Akurithere has gone through changes, which made it uninhabitable. I was sent with some others to find another place for us to live."

"What?" Pero exclaims. "Did you find another place? Why didn't you tell me this all along?"

"I did not want to bother you Pero." Kuon replies. "You had your own problems and since it was the same elders who banished you, I thought you wouldn't be interested."

"Well I am interested." Pero cries. "So did you find another place? How long do we have left?"

"We were unable to find another place and the little time we have is drawing to a close." Kuon added sadly as he turned to Pero.

"What exactly is wrong with Akurithere?"
Pero asks.

"Long periods of drought that made it

difficult to find food. The gardens are no longer as fruitful as it used to be. "Kuon replies.

Sitting down slowly on a rock outcrop next to Kuon, Pero asks.

"Drought? There has been no such thing here. In fact it rained just last night."

Kuon looks up at Pero in astonishment.
"It rained here?"

"Yes, why are you surprised?" Pero asks.

"Well it didn't rain yesterday. In fact the last time it rained was months ago. We have almost exhausted the water we got from that rainfall. I don't know what we are going to do if this drought continues." Kuon adds.

"Wow this is amazing?" Pero exclaims.
"It's been raining here for a while now."

"No wonder you never mentioned the draught. It's why I visited you frequently, to make sure you were alright." Kuon said, "I often wondered how you were coping, but all you mentioned was your loneliness." Kuon declares looking at Pero.

A smile on his face Pero turns to Kuon,

"Kuon I have something important to tell

you. It's something I should have told you a

long time ago. I hope you won't be upset with

me for keeping it from you for so long."

"What is it Pero?" Seeing Pero's hesitation, Kuon urges him

"You know you can tell me anything."

"Yes Kuon, but this is big." Pero replies cautiously

"Well tell me." Kuon presses.

Standing up and using his beak, Pero removes the sheath covering his body, revealing his beautiful feathers, which glistened and sparkled as the rays of the sun touched it.

Kuon, mouth wide open, stares at Pero, he moves around him with a dazed expression.

"When did this happen? How did it happen? Why are your feathers white and gold?" He asks.

Pero replied, "It happened some time ago.

After all the feathers fell away, the white

and gold ones began to grow. I did not want to say anything until I was sure it would stay on. Kuon there is more. This time I need to take you there so that you can see it. It may solve the problem the elders sent you to resolve."

"It can? How?" Kuon asks.

Trust me, when we get there you can ask all the questions you want." Pero says with a smile.

# Pekeanthra

When they arrive at Pero's secret place, Kuon walks slowly to the center of the place that has grown to a small town though no one lives in the houses or huts that Pero built.

"You did all this?" Kuon asked.

Pero nods, "Yes I did."

"How could you?" Kuon asks. "How could you keep all this a secret from me? Why would you do that?"

"I am sorry Kuon," Pero pleads. "I was so busy building all these huts, I barely made it to see you at our meeting place."

"No wonder you always looked exhausted. I thought it was because of your grief." Kuon says looking at Pero.

"Kuon there is still more," Pero says as he turns towards his dwelling, calling out.

"Kera, come and meet our guest." Suddenly the curtain over the doorway opens and Kera walks out in the splendor of her beautiful colored feathers.

Kuon's mouth falls wide open. "Who is
she?"

"This is Kera my wife."

"Your what? When did you get married?"
Kuon asks.

"Kera found her way here and we were married under Ku-Son's guiding eyes."

"Who is Ku-Son?" Kuon asked looking around.

"You can't see him, but if you let him, he will speak into your heart. He was the one that led me to this place. He fed me each day and taught me how to build all these houses. He imparted on me the urgency to complete them quickly. That's why I was always so exhausted. Now it's clear why the urgency. It's so that you can all move and live here."

Kuon looks around, it looks like a fairy tale, the grass are lush and green, the birds sing in the trees, the flowers spread their petals towards the sun rays in dazzling colors. The shelters are all made with such exquisite workmanship it is hard to believe

that Pero made them, Kuon thought to himself. The river is inviting as it sparkles under the warmth of the sun's rays. It is a beautiful place. Tears in his eyes Kuon speaks with nostalgia, "This was how Akurithere used to be. But this place is more beautiful than Akurithere. Now I understand why you had to go through what you did. So that you could prepare this place for us when it was time."

"Now you understand. Let the elders know that you have found the ideal place for them. It's ready. All furnished."

"Thank you Pero, especially after all they did to you. We have a lot to thank you for." Kuon says.

Soon the elders and all the people come rejoicing when they find this wonderful place, thanks to Pero who they treated badly. With open hands Pero welcomes and introduces them to Kera. The people are amazed at their beauty and perfection. Pero and Kera in turn makes sure everyone settles in their new homes.

The elders call a meeting and when everyone gathers they declare the place is to be called Pekeanthra, the place of Pero and Kera. Pero was made King of Pekeanthra and Kera, Queen. This is how Pekeanthra was created. It grew to be the largest civilization that the world ever knew.