

There is no magic to destiny.

Like any force, it is subject to rules and principles.

Its momentum persists unless we actively choose to change it,  
and “consequence” is merely the name we give to its realignment.

This is the *Nomos Motus Totalus* – The Law of Conserved Momentum.

It is the foundation upon which all fate-based science is built,  
and the invariable truth that grants us mastery over it.

Excerpt from the *First Principles of Fate Mechanics, vol. I*

Looking back, it’s hard to believe there was ever a time when I accepted this  
as fact.

From the journal of Ella Gant

## Prologue

“Cetus celebrates 62nd Annual Fair!” That was the headline emblazoned on the cover of the aptly named Cetus Gazette. Below it lay a black-and-white photo of the town square, beautifully decorated in celebratory banners, bows, and balloons. The article was dated just yesterday. However, as Noal Kai lowered the newspaper he felt his heart sink along with it, for there was no sign of that celebration here today – not amongst the collapsed buildings, fallen arches, or toppled trees, and certainly not amongst the distraught townsfolk standing in the ruins of their once beloved homes. The little town of Cetus was now gone.

Noal crouched down to pinch some of the soot between his fingers. He didn't need to ask what had happened here; his surroundings already told the whole story. Scattered footprints clearly marked where innocent people – acquaintances, neighbors, and friends – had pushed and shoved each other out of the way while running for their lives. Piles of debris lay scattered where shingled roofs had torn away from their homes or stone walls had ripped away brick-by-brick. Gaping holes were all that remained of cobblestone roads that looked like they'd literally sucked themselves out of the ground, or trees that had been uprooted like garden-variety weeds. The air hung stagnant, without a single bird's song, insect's buzz, or even the slightest breeze to break the

stillness of decay. To anyone else, all of this would have seemed unfathomable. To him, it was all too familiar. It was just like *Orion City*.

Noal squeezed the ashes tightly before slamming the ground in frustration. That certainly caught the attention of a few nearby folks, but they just as quickly forgot about him again to return to rummaging through the remnants of their former lives. After all, what could this diminutive, fifteen-year-old boy possibly have to do with any of this? But the truth was that this *was* his fault. It was his fault because he'd been too late to stop it – his fault because he'd failed in his mission. And the worst part was that it was destined to be his fault again, unless he could track down the *tattooed man* and end this vicious cycle once and for all. That thought alone would have to be enough to keep him going.

Trekking to the outskirts of town, Noal pulled a worn-out map from his cloak pocket. He frowned as he looked at all the open land surrounding Cetus. The nation of Terra was only sparsely populated; most of it was wide open plains, forest, or desert. That meant that his quarry would likely head for a hub – somewhere he could find transport. The closest one just happened to be the capital of Terra itself.

*Selene.*

Noal exhaled a conflicted sigh. Selene had a population over a hundred times that of Cetus; a confrontation there would surely endanger even more lives. But what choice did he have? *One day*, he decided. He would give himself one day to get in there and hunt down his prey – no more.

The *tattooed man* would not escape this time.