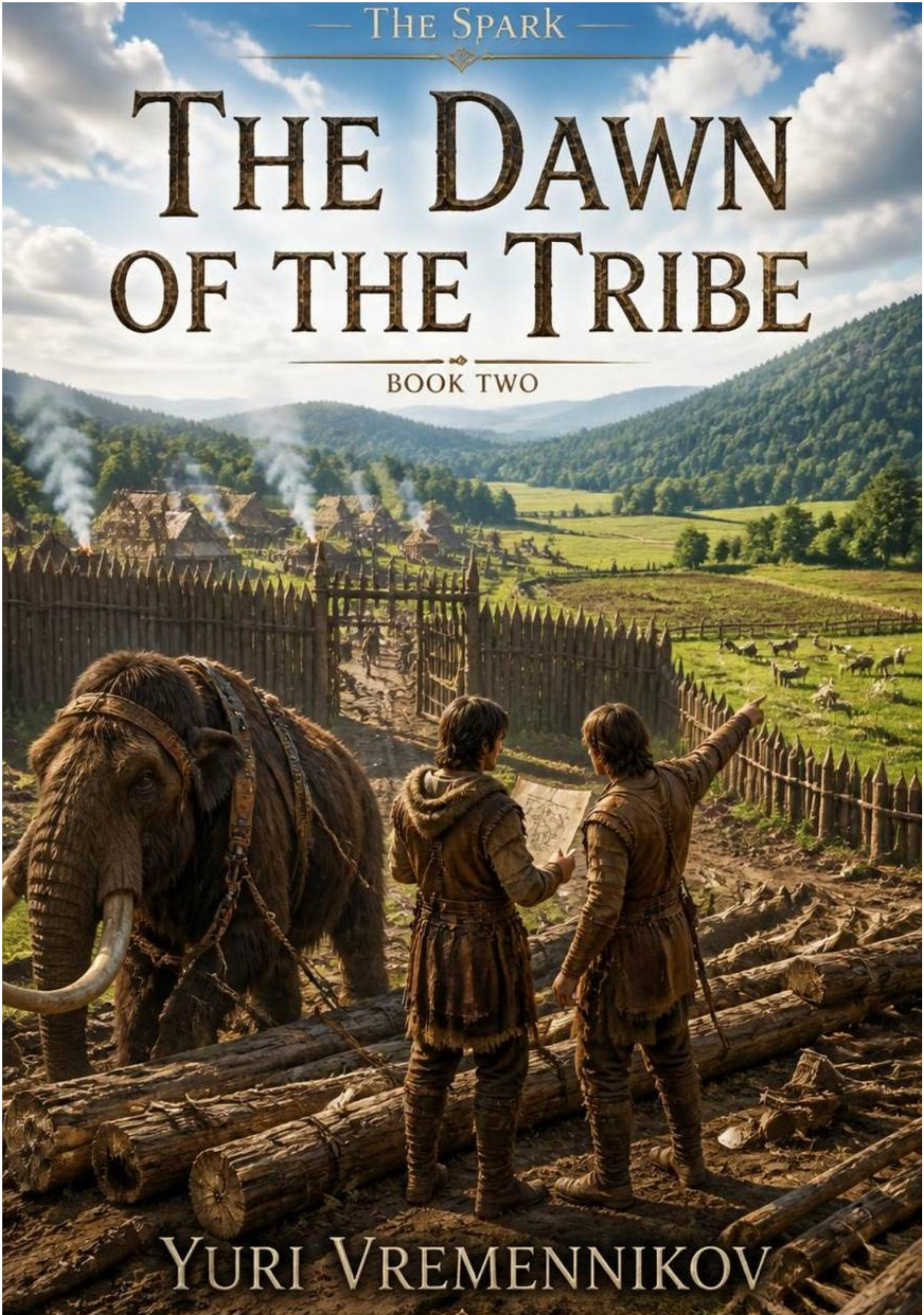

THE SPARK
THE DAWN OF THE TRIBE
BOOK TWO
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Юрий Временников

Volume 2. The Dawn of the Tribe

«Автор»
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A year ago, the two brothers who had fallen through time saved the "Grey Lynxes" tribe from hunger and enemies. Now they are building a real settlement: teaching people agriculture and animal husbandry, taming the mammoth Fluffy, inventing the potter's wheel and the loom. Miron creates a school for children, while Arsen trains defenders — enemies do not sleep. When the "Fanged Ones" attack the tribe, the brothers lead the defense. At the cost of losses, they manage to repel the attack, but peace is not eternal. The second book is about how a spark turns into a flame, and survival turns into life.

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Юрий Временников
Volume 2. The Dawn of the Tribe

Chapter 1. The Spring of Hopes

Spring came to this world unexpectedly bright — as if someone enormous had exhaled warmth all at once and awakened everything living. Only yesterday snow lay on the branches, and today it was already running in streams, revealing last year's leaves and the first green grass pushing through the mold. The air filled with the smell of meltwater, rotting leaves, and something new, alarming and sweet, that happens only at the beginning of spring, when nature is reborn after a long sleep.

Miron sat on a large boulder at the entrance to the dugout and watched the forest wake up. He loved this time — the time of change. In his past life, spring meant the start of the field season, excavations, new hopes of finding something amazing. Now spring meant survival. Winter was over, supplies were running low, but soon fresh greens would appear, herds of deer would come, and one could hunt to one's heart's content.

Beside him, leaning his back against the warm stone, sat Arsen. His brother, as always, was busy with something — drawing something with a stick on a piece of birch bark spread on his knee. For three weeks now he had been struggling with the design of the bow, and today, it seemed, he had found a solution. Miron glanced at the drawing — complex lines, calculations, notes. Arsen had always been like that: before making something, he calculated everything. An engineer to the core.

"Look," Arsen handed his brother the birch bark. "If we make the base from elm, and glue a layer of sinew on the outside, it will spring stronger. I've calculated the approximate tension force here..." — He poked a finger at some numbers understandable only to him. "It should come out about twice as powerful as a simple bow. The arrow will pierce a bison's hide clean through."

Miron smiled. Even here, in the Stone Age, his brother remained an engineer, a designer, a man who couldn't live without improving the world around him. He himself, of course, hadn't forgotten his science either — there, in the corner of the dugout, lay a neatly folded collection of fossils gathered over the winter. Several vertebrae of some large animal, a fragment of a tusk, a strange stone with a shell imprint. But right now his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Ars, listen," he interrupted, distracting his brother from his calculations. "Do you notice how fast everything is changing? A year ago we were starving here, sleeping in a shelter, trembling with fear every night. And now we have dugouts, pots, stores of dried meat, even some kind of library made of birch bark... We're building a civilization here, do you understand?"

Arsen tore himself away from the drawing and looked at his brother. A smirk flickered in his eyes.

"And we've made enemies for ourselves," he added gloomily. "Bork came yesterday, saw tracks of foreign hunters south of the Big Ravine. Five of them, judging by the prints. They walked carefully, clearly scouting. If these are the same 'Fanged Ones' the refugees told us about..."

Miron's face darkened. Spring brings not only birds but also enemies. It's hard to fight in winter, but summer is the very time for raids. He remembered the stories of Yara, a woman from a ruined tribe whom they had taken in in the autumn. The "Fanged Ones" spared no one — neither old people nor children. They simply came, killed the men, took the women and supplies. If they were coming here...

"We'll manage," Miron said firmly. "We're not alone now. Look how many people are in the tribe — almost sixty. And our weapons are better than theirs. Your bow... By the way, when will it be ready?"

"In a couple of days. I still need to dry the string properly and soak it in fat so it doesn't get damp. And arrows — we need a lot of them."

"We'll make arrows. We'll get the women involved, the children. Everyone."

Chick burst out from around the bend of the path leading to the stream. He had grown — though he was only eight, the boy moved fast and noiselessly, like a forest animal used to hiding from

predators. With him was Niya — a girl of about seven whom the brothers had noticed last year for her amazing ability to mold clay figurines that looked like living animals. The children were out of breath, their faces flushed from running fast.

"Ir-Tan!" Chick shouted, running up and grabbing Miron by the arm. "There, by the stream... such bones! Big ones! Niya and I found them when we were looking for clay for pots!"

Miron leaped up instantly, forgetting everything in the world. His heart beat faster. He, a paleontologist who had dreamed all his life of finding something worthwhile, now had a unique opportunity to study the remains of ancient animals live — and not somewhere on an expedition where every vertebra had to be scraped out of rock for weeks, but right here, a few minutes' walk from the settlement. And most importantly — these animals might have roamed these forests quite recently, and maybe they roam them even now.

"Lead the way!" he shouted, grabbing his "tool" — a sharp stone for clearing, a piece of birch bark for notes, and a pouch where he could put small finds.

Arsen watched them go and shook his head. His brother would never change. The threat of attack, preparations for defense — all of it receded into the background when it came to bones. But, on the other hand, Miron was also contributing: his knowledge of animals, of their habits, of which bones could be used for tools — all of it came in handy. Arsen stayed — he had to finish the bow. He immersed himself in the drawing again, but kept one ear on what was happening around him.

From the neighboring dugout came Yara — the very woman they had saved in the autumn. She had already settled in, learned to make pots, and helped with the household. With her was her daughter, a little girl, and her nephew Vetka — a teenager of about twelve who looked at everyone like a wolf but was gradually thawing. Vetka was carrying an armful of brushwood for the fire.

"Or-Var," Yara addressed Arsen, "when are we going for roots? Veda says it's time to gather young shoots while they're juicy."

"Go today," Arsen replied. "Take someone from the hunters with you, just in case. The animals are hungry after winter."

Yara nodded and went to the women who were already gathering at the common fire. Life in the settlement was bustling — someone was sharpening stones, someone was weaving ropes from nettles, someone was repairing shelters after winter. Children ran around shouting, playing at hunting. An ordinary morning of an ordinary day in the Stone Age. But Arsen knew: this calm was deceptive. Somewhere out there, beyond the forest, enemies were already on the move, and spring would bring not only warmth but also blood.

Meanwhile, Miron and the children ran to the stream. The spring flood had greatly changed the banks — the water had risen and then subsided, exposing new layers of soil. In one place, where the stream made a bend, the water had washed away the steep bank, and huge bones protruded from the clay. Miron froze, unable to believe his eyes.

Vertebrae — each the size of a human head — lay right on the surface, as if waiting to be found. Nearby were fragments of ribs, long and curved, and a little further — part of a skull with a preserved tusk. The tusk was crooked, almost as long as Miron was tall, covered with cracks, but whole.

"A mammoth," Miron breathed. "A real woolly mammoth!"

He dropped to his knees right in the cold water, not noticing that he was getting wet. His hands trembled as he carefully touched the vertebra. Yes, it was it — Mammuthus primigenius, the very one Miron had read hundreds of books about, whose skeletons he had seen in museums, whose images he had reconstructed from skulls during his studies. But here, live, touching with his hand the fossilized (almost fossilized — the bones had not yet fully mineralized, they were heavy but not stone) surface, he felt something incredible — a touch of eternity. This animal had walked on this land, breathed this air, maybe just a few thousand years ago. And for geology, a few thousand years is like yesterday.

"Is this an evil spirit?" Niya asked fearfully, hiding behind Chick. The girl looked at the huge bones with horror and curiosity at the same time.

"No, little one," Miron turned and smiled, trying to speak calmly. "These are just the bones of an ancient animal. It lived here a very, very long time ago, when our tribe didn't exist yet. Then it died, and the earth preserved its bones. See these vertebrae?" — He pointed at the rounded bones. "This is part of the back. And these are ribs. And this is a tusk — mammoths had such long teeth to dig in the snow and get to the grass."

"Was it big?" Chick came closer, examining the vertebrae. In his eyes burned not fear but greedy interest. Miron recognized himself in this as a child.

"Huge. Taller than these trees." — Miron pointed at the tall pines. "Four meters at the shoulder, and with the tusks — even taller. Imagine, such a mountain walking, the ground trembling. And the wool was long, down to the ground, so it wouldn't freeze."

"How did it die?" Chick asked.

"I don't know. Maybe it grew old, maybe it got stuck in a swamp, maybe hunters killed it. But the bones were preserved because they were covered with earth. Now the water has washed away the bank, and we see them."

Miron carefully began to clear the find, explaining to the children how to work so as not to damage the bones. Chick listened greedily, memorizing every word. He could already count, write a little, and clearly strove for knowledge. Niya was also interested, but she was more attracted not by the bones but by the strange patterns on them — traces of teeth of some predator that had gnawed the mammoth after death.

"Who gnawed this?" she asked, pointing at the scratches.

"Maybe a cave lion, maybe hyenas. They lived then. Also huge."

The children gasped. Miron grinned: he himself would have gasped at seeing a live cave lion. But so far, thank the gods, they had met only ordinary predators — bears, wolves, lynxes. And that was enough.

After sitting by the stream until the very evening, Miron selected several vertebrae and a fragment of tusk — for study and for crafts. He sprinkled the rest with earth to preserve it until next time. Chick and Niya helped carry the finds to the settlement. On the way, Miron told them about mammoths, about the Ice Age, about how people hunted these giants. The children listened with their mouths open.

They returned to the settlement already after dark. People were sitting by the fire, soup was cooking. Seeing Miron with his burden, many came over to look. The news of the find quickly spread through the tribe. The old shaman Gurr, on hearing it, frowned and shook his head:

"These are the bones of earth spirits. They must not be disturbed. The spirits will be angry."

"Gurr," Miron said gently, sitting down next to the shaman by the fire. "Look. These bones are very, very old, they've lain in the earth for thousands of years. The spirits left them long ago. And we can make useful things from them." — He took one vertebra, heavy and dense. "See? From such a bone you can make an excellent spearhead — stronger than stone. Or needles for sewing hides. Or amulets to protect people. The spirits will be glad if we use their gifts wisely."

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