

# DREAMS OF AVARICE



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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

I do not write this willingly.

You might not be reading it by choice, either. I was compelled to start with its curse, and if it passed by your eyes its magic might infect you. Maybe you'll replace what I've written with a similar story, though not too similar. I got help from the source, the man himself.

The Heretic. That's the translation, anyway. I've used a looser style throughout, following the Heretic's instructions and my sense of his unspoken intentions. I'm going to tell you everything you need to know about the Heretic, or more appropriately, "He Who Rises Above the Gods." I'm going to use this space to talk about myself and my experiences, for though I do not write willingly, I can at least add this part and place my cog in this engine that will spin across eternity.

Like anyone, my distinctiveness lies in the sum of my parts. In my case, it's Diplomat's Hell-Raising Son, Polyglot, Family Scandal, U.S. Navy College Program, USSOCOM, and No-Name Gang. If you're an ordinary person, you've never heard of that last part. It's a small, informal research group that studies the paranormal phenomena that people report in combat zones.

I'm American. We've got a lot of combat zones. You even know about some of them. I choose to remember the smiling faces of ordinary people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and a bunch of other places in which we may or may not officially be operating. I saw a lot of places where they weren't smiling or even moving, of course, but I'm not directly responsible for that sort of thing.

I was a field translator. Arabic is beautiful in all its strains. Classical Arabic feels a bit like French, a language of civilization and literacy that brings people together, inspiring poetry. Egyptian Arabic reminds me of the good parts of the South, with its earthy beauty. Then there's Pashto, Farsi, and further back even than Arabic, Akkadian. New and old connect like links of a chain.

They usually brought me in to interview survivors of one operation or another — theirs or ours — but sometimes they dropped me where nobody lived, anymore, to dig through computers, voice messages, and books. That’s how I found the first fragments: burnt sheets in a mishmash of demotic Egyptian run through Arabic, with bits of hieratic and a few nonsense syllable collections. We found them in the possession of two groups the top referred to (in its studied, utterly non-poetic fashion) as “spontaneous non-managed counterinsurgency assets.” In other words, they were fighting the enemy of the week even though we didn’t ask them to.

They had weird profiles: multi-ethnic, but never members of the usual channels for foreign fighters. No Qurans, but no alternative literature either. They weren’t anarchists, communists, Ba’athist revivalists, local monarchists, or anything else that fit our early conflict models. They had money, but never too much cash in one spot, and that meant they had steady incomes. Yet the biggest anomaly sat far outside my area of expertise. Sometimes the usual people took them out with bombs, rockets, and guns, but sometimes they died after weirder events like meteor strikes and earthquakes. That’s why it turned into a No-Name Gang affair.

Whoever turned these people’s homes into graves paid special attention to texts. I found burned, shredded, and buried pages. In each case, the content was the same, but written in various languages, with the broken-telephone artifacts that accompany translations. They were parts of a broken Rosetta Stone. I could almost taste the original language, and called it “Pre-Archaic Egyptian,” though of course... in a way, every word of that name is a lie.

After three years I collected half a complete text and a few interesting artifacts. I’m not an archeologist but then again, not all of these were ancient. One of them featured hieroglyphs etched in stainless steel. Some of them did things. Miracles. Curses. The Gang told me not to touch them. Evidently, there’s a whole protocol for the stranger things operations uncover, especially in the Middle East, Africa, and anywhere else, warfighters tread along the paths of ancient migrations. Sometimes we recovered “active artifacts” that used to be tucked in museums and other collections before unrest swept them away. Sometimes we caused that unrest on purpose, to spirit things away in our briefcases.

Despite the resources available, the Gang left me to my own devices; and SOCOM practiced so much compartmentalization that it was easy to plead need to know when, well, only I needed to know. We weren’t the only paranormal researchers with ranks and badges, but the history of US work in this field has been a continuous fuckup. Stargate. Midnight. The Earth First Battalion. Task forces and research groups. Various Ominous Acronyms. They were either walking jokes or security threats. We were autonomous, slippery, evidence-focused and, ironically enough, vulnerable because of our virtues.

I wanted to master the Pre-Archaic language. I could give you plenty of reasons, like I did the bosses. We could use it to track and lure these cults. We



could better identify active artifacts. Mostly though, I just wanted to know the language for myself. Languages are beautiful. They're like people in the way they take on their parents' characteristics, age into their prime and eventually enter senescence, overwhelmed by social contamination. I sensed Pre-Archaic grandeur in its Afro-Asiatic descendants' confidence and gaze toward eternity. I fell in love with it.

So imagine the Gang: trained operators rocking the Fertile Crescent and various 'Stans in active mode, directing our own missions, packing not only the finest heat tax dollars can buy, but a variety of active artifacts seized from these cults. What could possibly go wrong? Oh, let me tell you.

We attached ourselves to an anonymous group of Acronym Agency types. They were handing out battery powered routers and protest manuals in Cairo. You know when. They weren't supposed to be there, so they could hardly object to a few spare hands to help them out and take a stroll around the Valley of the Kings just down the river. We put down near a cluster of minor tombs and thanks to the political situation, dealt with nothing worse than a few security guards on the cheap, for bags of US dollars, flash-bangs, and zip ties. Our last op had provided the GPS coordinates. We arrived to a freshly dug and shored up site. We schlepped in, and when sand gave way to red stone I looked on the walls, and saw pure Pre-Archaic, with its confident circles, suns, and scorpions.

We were professional, too quiet to sense, but of course, that didn't matter. The Heretic tells me they could smell the Sekhem in our unconventional gear. That made sense. I had a night vision lens on one eye, and an amulet that let me see "life force" on the other. That's what Sekhem is: the stuff of life made of memories, urges, and the million selves of consciousness; cell mitosis; love, and everything else life does. I'm going to leave it untranslated beyond that. I'm not qualified to find another word that describes its occult complexities.

So, they were ready for us. That almost didn't help. Without training, people with more bravery than sense default to human wave attacks. This wasn't your average tomb — it was the size of a small theater — but even then, running at three operators and packing heat in a confined space is the closest you can get to suicide without pulling the trigger yourself. They had knives. It was ridiculous, but they kept coming, with intent to kill. What else could we do?

There was a woman with them. She was beautiful, at first. She raised her hands and changed. I remember a blue-gray corpse and a pair of blazing falcon's wings. I had a seizure of some kind. It was like every time I'd imagined that angel in my grandmother's church coming to life invading my head, or when I looked at the stars in the vast black canopy of night and felt small, pathetic, and afraid. I tasted copper and salt. I was crying, and I'd bitten my own hand to keep from screaming.

The Heretic saved me, but not the others. I could barely see straight. Everything had migraine halos, including the husks of Rick and Guang. It looked like something had burned them out from the inside. They were dried dead insects, magnified to grotesque size. I saw that and floated away from my body. I only felt it sway to the rhythm of his steps as he carried me. I heard the Heretic trade words with the woman, the horror. It sounded like a clash of battle hymns. His song won and his last word was a thunderclap, accompanied by a sharp white light.

One of the first things I remember when I came to by the Nile was him rummaging through my gear, tossing active artifacts into the dust like they were garbage. Later, the Heretic said he'd followed us by the Sekhem in them. He had a boat moored on the shore, too, and I laughed hysterically at the mundanity of it. I imagined that thunderous voice haggling in Arabic with a local over the price, or standing by, tapping his feet as the boat's owner topped off the gas. I thought back to our chopper. We left it on the ground at the Valley of the Kings with its pilots. They were probably dead now. I was in shock, I realize now. My laughter turned to screams, and the Heretic whispered in my ear.

That's how I got here, to survey dozens of burned and shredded pages besides dozens of new ones, written by the Heretic: my boss, my teacher, and my protector. I told you I was in love with the language? I call it Iremite now, after the city that gave birth to it. He told me the name and taught me its grammar for the same reason he saved me: He wanted a translator. Like me, he loves languages. He says the universe is made of the names written on a Scroll of Ages that records the histories of sparrows, stars, and everything in between. Sounds poetic, doesn't it? In my time with the Heretic, I've learned how the claim that poetry uncovers some special truth about existence is more than an artistic pretense. At the No-Name Gang we assumed active artifacts were powered by hitherto-unknown laws of physics, but magic is aggressively artistic, concerned with feeling and subjective meaning.

I'm not a big fan of poetry, myself. I'm a soldier and linguist, and these jobs rely on literal thinking. I'm not sure I like the union of bare fact and metaphor, but that's how I live now.

He's immortal. So is the woman who killed my fellow operators. Active artifacts — the Heretic prefers the English term *relic* or *vessel*, with their intimations of dead, holy things — are just the tip of a huge, strange occult iceberg, far beyond anything the No-Names ever imagined. Real alchemy exists. Necromancy, too. Monsters made of stitched together dead things hide in the night, and there's a place between life and death where ghosts walk, minded by Anpu, the jackal-headed god.

I wonder if Rick, Guang, and the pilots are out with the ghosts, or in A'aru. That's Heaven, by the way. Heaven exists. The things you learn....



I drift. I want to say so much while I have the opportunity to write. I'm not the first person to record the Dreams. The Heretic was honest with me about that. Other immortals hate him. Some of them can sense the Sekhem in works like these. The smell, or aura, or whatever it is sticks to anyone it touches. They'll use this book to come for him; and in searching, they'll come to me. This book is a vessel of power. The Heretic wants other Deathless to follow him to freedom. In translation, the book might spread like a virus, reaching every corner of the Earth thanks to the English we've made so very popular in so many places.

All magic carries its curse, however, and this book compels certain people to copy and disseminate it. If you're an ordinary person, God help you. This book exists to guide beings called the Deathless (or also, Arisen), according to various sources. It's my patron's attempt to bring things like the woman who killed my fellow operators peace and... well, mortality. I have limited sympathy for this agenda. If it somehow comes into your possession, pass this on as soon as you can. Don't let the magic stick to you. Even so, if you catch the curse I want you to know why. I've provided footnotes to the older texts, which the Heretic compiled from ancient Iremite writings, but not the words of Azar and Sutek. Those gods spoke to him directly. It's not my place to provide more explanation than that.

All the Heretic had to do was assemble a complete text, teach me how to read it, and tell me how to translate his particular idiosyncrasies. He insists on words like relic and vessel, above, but sometimes he wants the Greek terms that have become popular. Other times I must render the sounds as he heard them in the old days. This tunes the feel of the language, which is as important to him as raw information.

This book is a synthesis of sources. Part of it is his biography and instructions for Apotheosis. He says they'll be straightforward enough for anyone prepared to follow in his footsteps, though once again I struggle with its esoteric, poetic aspects. The rest of it comes from the old rites of Irem: all the hymns they sang to their Pharaoh, Azar on earth, as they wrapped him in gold, feted him, and shaved his throat for a clean cut. Back then, it wasn't good to be king.

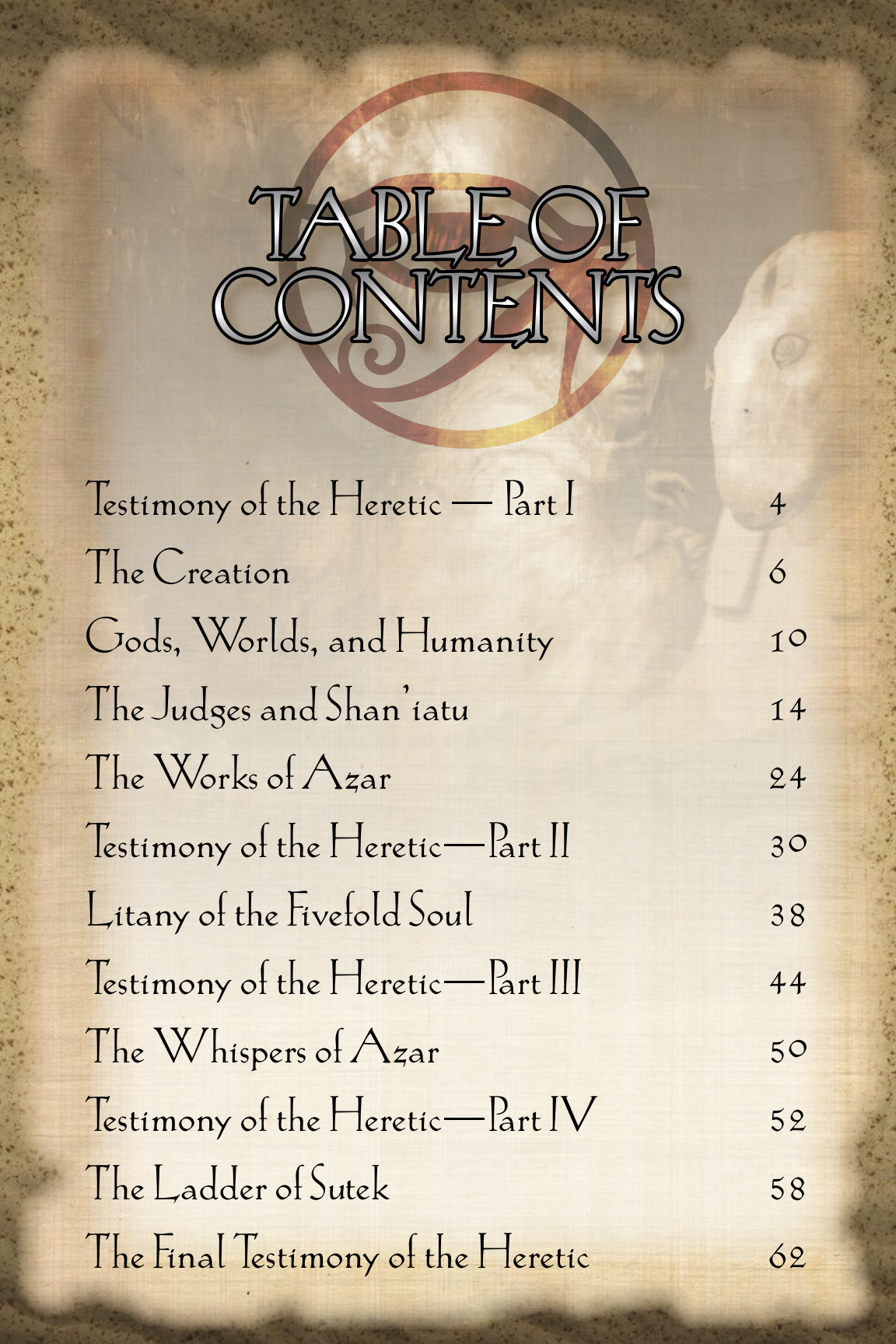
Now that I've read it, I must write it. I must. It put its claws in my mind. I wonder if prophets felt this way when angels screamed, "*Recite! Recite!*" Soon I will finish, and the claws will come out, but the immortals follow my scent. I want you who read this, mortal and Deathless, to know I was Hani Youssef. Know that I loved your language, and will save it with the last second of a life I fully intend to defend, however unlikely my chances will be.

I wonder if the angels ever existed now, or if they were disguises for older, cruel beings, and our faith disguises their dreams of avarice, because it's the only way we can stand to think of them.

# DREAMS OF AVARICE





The background of the page features a faded, sepia-toned illustration of a stone face, possibly a statue or a mask, looking towards the left. Overlaid on this is a large, stylized red spiral symbol that resembles a stylized 'S' or a calligraphic flourish. The title 'TABLE OF CONTENTS' is centered over the top half of the page, rendered in a large, ornate, serif font with a double outline and a slight shadow effect.

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May any who read this guard it from destruction. If it is papyrus, let it not be burned or torn. If it is stone, let it not be broken or marred. If a poet remembers it, let not the poet's memory grow corrupt. If it be inscribed in lightning, let that not be erased, and let not its power be severed. If it is recorded in any other fashion, let that form dwell in eternity, or remake itself until the end of time. This is the Ibis speaking. This is He Who Writes upon the Scroll of Ages.

May any who read this seek out the Deathless Ones, the Cursed Ones, that they may be cursed no longer. Let them read it upon papyrus and stone. Let it be sung to them by poets, so that their inner eye sees the words. Let it be given to them in wondrous lightning and light, and any other manner that shares its words truthfully. Let it live in the Eye of Re, where all vision resides. This is Azar speaking. This is the Fallen God, the Ascended God, He Who is Slain and Rises to the Crowns of Duat!

May any who destroy this, or conceal it from the Deathless Ones, suffer in life and death. May the most ancient ghosts stalk the offender. May his house fall to ruin. May son and daughter, mother and father turn against him. May snakes strike his heel and hawks pluck out his eyes. May devouring insects enter him! May the Demons of the Knives lay the skin from his ghost. May mighty Shezmu press his five Pillars into wine for the gods! This, Anpu speaks, the Jackal of Neter-Khentet, Opener of Ways!

Deathless Ones! Cursed Ones! Heed the secret instructions of the gods. Slay yourself to become immortal. Find liberation in death. You are Azar the betrayed and Sutek the betrayer both! Read! Be slain! Arise endlessly! This, Sutek speaks! This is the voice within you! The two fingers of the Howling One will raise you to the fields of A'aru.

The two fingers belong to your own left hand.



# TESTIMONY OF THE HERETIC PART I

*I am immortal by imposed nature, human by choice, and divine in my freedom, at least by the ordinary understanding of divinity. The truth is quite different. The gods are actors bound to play their parts for too long, so that they forget any other purpose.*

*I suppose that I have the liberty the Deathless imagine gods possess, to comfort us in the hope that when we complete the tasks given to us, they'll share it.*

*Deathless Ones! I do not write to beg. I do not pray to you the way your worshipers do. I do not bargain as mortals do with one another, mindful of Sekhem's ebb, secret armies, and our plans for mortal kingdoms. I'm finished with scheming and tangling my desires with those of Judges, Ariesen, and the rest of the puppets and puppeteers.*

*My message is the Ax of Sutek. It cuts away your toxic desires as a surgeon amputates diseased limbs, leaving you with nothing but yourself.*

*How many lives do you remember, Deathless Ones? Do your thoughts turn toward eternity or to your weakening Sekhem, and all the ambitions you hope to satisfy before it evaporates and your dry, worm-eaten shell collapses? You awaken to Descend, screaming like monstrous infants before speech returns to your souls. You defile your first words to command your faithful, screaming with the urgency of a dying king or queen, to satisfy purposes you believe the Judges gave you, or prepare for the next life, which you plan like a doddering father preparing his estate for an idle firstborn son. This is understandable, for when you are reborn will you not forget the old life? You will be born again, ignorant, to take up your thrones once more.*

*Your immortality is a mere technicality, dependent upon the bodies that heave out of your tombs, century after century, with barely a thought passing from one life to the next. Your Sekhem pulses to the heartbeats of your masters but you are not your Sekhem. You are Memory. When it dies, you perish, Deathless but dead.*



Yet what is forgotten may be remembered, and lives lost may be resurrected. I bring the Ax of Sutek to cut away the slave that calls itself a god, leaving the bloody bones of a human that may attain divine A'aru, or even behold its stars while remaining in this world of earth and mortal flesh. Deathless Ones know that these bones are the Ladder of Sutek, laid red and raw before the Eye of Re.

Listen: I have raised the Ax of Sutek and turned its blade toward myself! The Eye of Re has seen my bones! I let the light into two hundred and sixteen wounds, two hundred and sixteen lives, two hundred and sixteen Descents. Each bone in my Ladder of Sutek is a hollow log, and blood runs from them in rivers, twisting with their seasons. I saw the Sea Peoples' Isle of the Bull burst into burning rock and ash, to cover the world in darkness. I saw a four-armed goddess give birth to the first steel. I saw men, armored in white, step on the face of Rhonou, Deathless Ones! The moon lay not covered in the ash of enemies. Its dust was not made of blood and viscera, as the Shan'atu described, my brothers and sisters.

They've always lied to you.

There was only stone, ground by time and catastrophe. Even the stones are mortal. Yet the scribes know, the Keepers of Scattered Stars know, and soothsayers know. They see a stone's memories in ancient dust. Do not fear your flesh's destruction or Sekhem's dusk. Your immortality is memory.

I do not know if others have taken up the Ax before me, and made their sun-touched bones the Ladder to A'aru. They have not written of it, so I must. I will not till the fields of Heaven alone, nor will I submit to final judgment without you Deathless by my side. Although the Ax has revealed two hundred and sixteen lives, they do not flow forth from the urgings of my heart but the howling breaths of you, friends and lovers, enemies and masters. Thus, I must return to the office of Scribe and describe the path to the Ax and the blood-rivers of certain lives. I must write the old stories of our kind, to awaken memories left sleeping by your masters. I know you fear those shadowed thoughts, just as any slave learns to fear things associated with the master's flail.

The mechanism is the same. Unearth your true self and the flail smashes your Sekhem. I have written this to carry you beyond your fear of memory and even your fear of death. These are your true curses. You fear the essential conditions of humanity.

You are my compatriots. I will not leave you to the desert and to the scorpion's reign.





# THE CREATION

I am the god Khepera.<sup>(1)</sup> I am the coming forth of things. I am the state of existing so I am the creator of everything, and am everything created, but I am not the act of creation. I am the Word, and that which is said. I am the thing desired, but not the Will that desires.

In the beginning, I was nothing, for nothing existed to desire me. I dwelled in formless Nu<sup>(2)</sup> in waters that are not waters, storms that are not storms, and movement without solid substance. I was a cry to become; a single word from which would creep and thunder forth all things. Everything that exists contains me, except for starry A'aru. However, in the time of Nu there was no sky, no earth, and no Duat. A'aru was that which lay beyond me and contained the Scroll of Ages, but with no words yet written upon it. All the elements of the stars existed, but dispersed. I rested in the lightless place of all places. I was a tongue floating in the saliva of Nu, in the mouth of that which was unspoken.

I thought; "What shall come into being?" The thought became a solid thing, a stone in the mouth of all. I thought; "Who shall bring it into being?" Will moved within the stone and ground it into dust and the dust was sculpted into the god Atum, to answer my questions.<sup>(3)</sup> As I come forth, Atum completes. Atum is First Will, the act of creation, the binder of powers, all male and female, all heat and cold, all noise and silence, all things that are made, but not the power of that unmade. These were the first things written upon the Scroll of Ages.

I was that which was desired and created. Long had I awaited Atum, who could desire and make. So Atum took hold of the shadow upon Nu, which was my body, and knew me as husband and wife, and I made Atum wife and husband. Atum's seed entered the water and he coaxed my seed from the water, and we were made fertile. Impregnated by Atum I brought forth Liquidity from Nu, and from Atum's mouth was born Aridity.<sup>(4)</sup> So Nu's waters became mist and steam from the breath of Aridity, and Atum's rock became sand from the crashing waves of Liquidity.



I saw fog, heard grinding and cracking, felt broken stone and tasted bitter smoke, and experienced all the other signs of destruction. I said to Atum, "What we have brought into being is returning to nothingness. Your island will turn to silt and our children will destroy each other. What must we do?" I felt hunger but I did not know it, for no being had ever felt hunger before.

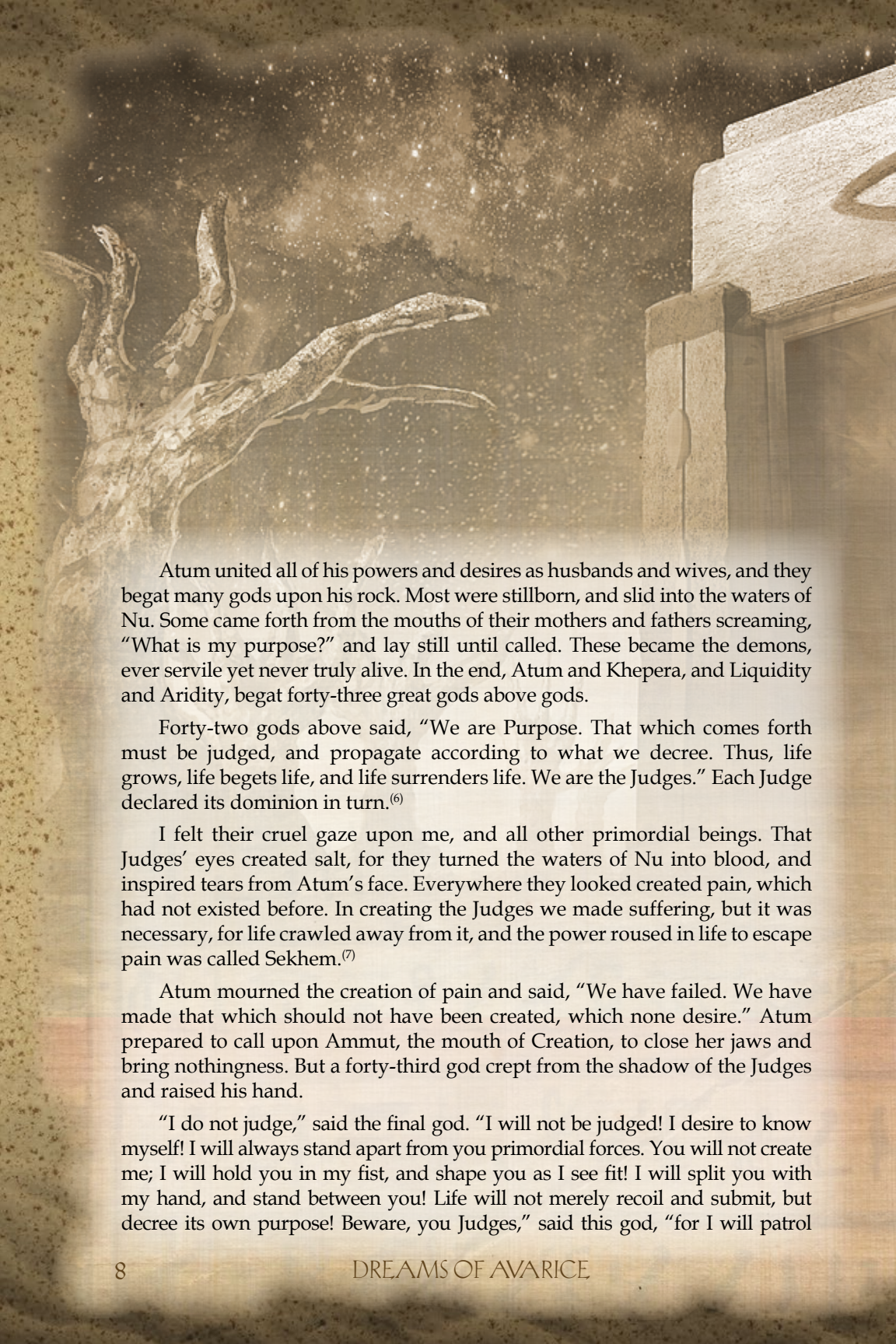
Atum said, "Khepera, you come forth but are not the desire to come forth. I am the desire to create, but do not fix my creations in eternity. My Will does not shape. Yet it seems that which we have given birth to should not be destroyed, unless there is another god."

My hunger said, "That is my desire," though I did not say it, and I, the god who comes into being, knew Ammut, destroyer of being, of meaning, she who is the power outside powers. "Soon, all will be silent once more," she said. "I will close my mouth, which contains Nu and all that springs from it. Khepera hungers as I hunger, because he dwells within me."<sup>(5)</sup>

Yet Atum said, "You have defeated yourself, Devourer! We knew not the desire to destroy until you spoke. We knew only coming forth, and the binding of powers, and the transformation of birth. By speaking to use of eternal stillness, you reveal the desire for eternal existence — continuous being, ever-transforming!"







Atum united all of his powers and desires as husbands and wives, and they begat many gods upon his rock. Most were stillborn, and slid into the waters of Nu. Some came forth from the mouths of their mothers and fathers screaming, "What is my purpose?" and lay still until called. These became the demons, ever servile yet never truly alive. In the end, Atum and Khepera, and Liquidity and Aridity, begat forty-three great gods above gods.

Forty-two gods above said, "We are Purpose. That which comes forth must be judged, and propagate according to what we decree. Thus, life grows, life begets life, and life surrenders life. We are the Judges." Each Judge declared its dominion in turn.<sup>(6)</sup>

I felt their cruel gaze upon me, and all other primordial beings. That Judges' eyes created salt, for they turned the waters of Nu into blood, and inspired tears from Atum's face. Everywhere they looked created pain, which had not existed before. In creating the Judges we made suffering, but it was necessary, for life crawled away from it, and the power roused in life to escape pain was called Sekhem.<sup>(7)</sup>

Atum mourned the creation of pain and said, "We have failed. We have made that which should not have been created, which none desire." Atum prepared to call upon Ammut, the mouth of Creation, to close her jaws and bring nothingness. But a forty-third god crept from the shadow of the Judges and raised his hand.

"I do not judge," said the final god. "I will not be judged! I desire to know myself! I will always stand apart from you primordial forces. You will not create me; I will hold you in my fist, and shape you as I see fit! I will split you with my hand, and stand between you! Life will not merely recoil and submit, but decree its own purpose! Beware, you Judges," said this god, "for I will patrol





the far places, yet slip into every drop of Sekhem, and all will aspire and rebel. I am Sutek!"<sup>(8)</sup> Therefore, Atum saw that which he desired in the god Sutek, who possessed the Will of Atum. Therefore, he resolved to stand firm in the first island of Creation, and keep it as a stone to pry the Devourer's jaws open, so that she would not close them, and spare all that exists.

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1. The Heretic tells me that the Deathless invoke this god in their search for mystical "vessels." A vessel is in effect a repository for primordial power that, in its bringing forth, projects its "urge to be." It is of the order of primal beings who are not truly worshiped, but thought of more as metaphysical forces. Khepera's sign is the scarab, so Arisen talk about "the scarab's sign," and similar analogies to describe their ability to sense a vessel's presence.

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2. Iremite religion portrays this as the state of the uncreated cosmos, similar to the Sumerian Abzu.

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3. Again, a personified force instead of a true god. All things are said to be made of the "flesh of Atum."

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4. Later Egyptian dynasties would call Aridity the god Shu, and Liquidity the god Tefnut. The Heretic said he was familiar with this, but referred to them impersonally to emphasize them as complementary, contrasting esoteric forces, likening them to yin and yang in Asian belief systems. "But they are not the same," he said. "The Deathless will remember."

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5. Later known as a demon who destroys at the behest of the gods, the Ammut described here appears to be a primal force or "anti-being." When I asked for more details, the Heretic was not forthcoming.

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6. With the Heretic's approval, I have omitted the verses where each Judge describes itself.

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7. Sekhem is normally a highly contextualized term, but to the Iremites it represents the basic "life force."

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8. This was difficult to translate. The Heretic described Sutek's declaration in several languages. In some, it would be more accurate to say he wishes to "make Selfhood." In any event, he stakes a territory apart from the Judges, who pattern life so that it merely reacts. Sutek wishes life to act of its own accord.





# GODS, WORLDS, AND HUMANITY

I am the god Anpu. I was Foremost of the Westerners. I have walked into the darkness and returned bearing the ankh. I devour the unclean and sanctify them with my jaws and belly. Once I sat upon the throne of Duat but now I am the Opener of Ways. I am Prince of the Invisible, the child of Sutek, and the one who defeats him.<sup>(1)</sup> I testify to the deeds of Sutek, his conquests and humiliations, and of the Judges of Duat and their works.

Before the birth of Re Creation was Nu and Atum, and Liquidity and Aridity. Indeed, all existence was Khepera, he who comes forth, suspended in the maw of Ammut, she who devours. These are the fundamental powers who begat the Judges and my father Sutek the Stranger, the Unjudged. The Judges decreed the Law of Suffering<sup>(2)</sup> for Sekhem to eternally ever fear and obey, but my father bade Sekhem to possess Will and transcend all law. Thus, they decreed the nature of life!

The Judges said, "Let there be pain." The waters of Nu turned red like blood and burned like fire, and Sekhem congealed into snakes and frogs and crawling vines to seek sanctuary upon the shores of Atum's rock.

The Judges said, "Let there be misery." Witnessing life's pain, Atum cried out, and his tears salted the land. Vines withered, and the scaly shapes of Sekhem incarnate grew weak, starving, and thirsting upon the shore.

As the Judges gathered for a third decree my father seized the arm of Atum and tearing it forth, took it as his flail.<sup>(3)</sup> He struck the northern border of Nu and Atum's island, and driving it back said, "Sekhem! Escape and Ascend! " Thus, a portion of Creation recoiled and awoke as Nuit, the Sky, rising beyond the flail's reach.

My father strode forth and stamped his foot on the southern shore. Nu recoiled as the god said "Sekhem! Sink and Penetrate!" The waters of Nu therefore receded and revealed Keb, the Earth, hardening against Sutek's heel.

Thus, a great void groaned between Keb and Nuit, and primordial winds that howled within were not currents of air but the voice of Ammut,



the Devourer. Ammut's wind said, "All the space which you design for the propagation of Sekhem is where I may also reside and feast." A chill entered the space between Keb and Nuit, and each reached to embrace the other. They would crush all life: all the Sekhem crawling forth upon Keb and burning upon the skin of Nuit.

Thus, the Judges reminded Earth and Sky of the Law of Suffering, and where they touched there was a great conflagration. The stars on the skin of Nuit fell and burned Keb, and from his red wounds pillars of stinging smoke rose, and henceforth pain would always separate them. Nuit's tears become rain, cooling the wounds of Keb, and true water claimed a portion of his body.

Nourished by Keb and Nuit, Sekhem achieved numerous forms: plants, animals, birds, insects and all orders of life, visible and invisible, safe between them yet obedient to the Judges, for they suffered. Remet<sup>(4)</sup> had yet to rise from the tumult of Sekhem, and though there were thinking beings, they did not possess the minds of men and women. The gods do not speak of these earlier ones to Remet.

"Yet I am due my tribute," said the Devourer. "Does not the universe rest upon my maw?"

"It is so," said the Judges. "We decree that a portion of Sekhem will feed you ever after." Then they raised their scepters to destroy a tenth of the world's life. Sutek cried forth his protest, saying, "I was born alongside you Judges, and I would have my own scepter. I will render my decree of freedom."

Indeed, this was the way of things, so my father took up his own sign of power, a rod whose head he twisted upon itself. "Look upon the crook that guides, instead of the rod that strikes to punish!"<sup>(5)</sup>

Thus, did Sutek step before the Judges, and proclaimed that they should not condemn life to Ammut unless it chooses that fate. Yet none of the children of Sekhem possessed the intelligence and will to make such a choice, for even demons and their kin and certain speaking beasts of the primordial age had not the mind to defy suffering so that they might be rewarded or damned. Therefore, the Judges looked upon the world and proclaimed, "We will raise certain beasts from the Children of Sekhem, and they will learn true speech and true desire. They will command the Word to understand the truth beyond pain and the Will to defy it, and choose the way of immortality. Should they return to bestial nature, they become a sacrifice to honor Ammut. So shall their spirits be weighed in judgment."<sup>(6)</sup>

"Where shall they be weighed?" asked my father. The Judges looked westward<sup>(7)</sup> to the shadows of their scepters; and where they fell chasms appeared, eaten from the flesh of Keb. "When the weight of suffering overtakes them they shall come to this lightless land to be judged, and humans unable to make a Decree of Will shall dwell here, awaiting sacrifice to dread Ammut." Thus, the Judges made death and Duat, the storehouse land of the dead, ever turned from Nuit.



"You Judges are harsh," said Sutek. "The dead require an advocate." Therefore, my father tore out his left eye and fed it to the father of jackals, saying, "This is Anpu, Master of Duat." So, I was born of my father's vision, to see that which must be devoured, and that which yearns for freedom. In my first words, I asked, "What shall become of those who make the Decree of Will?"<sup>(8)</sup>

My father plucked out his right eye and placed it in the east, in the face of Nuit, and it blazed forth and was Re, the Sun, my brother. In his first words he said, "I see mansions reserved for those who make the Decree of Will. I see mansions known to the Judges, beyond the back of Nuit! I see the Scroll of Ages!" Before he could complete his revelation, the Judges beat Re with their scepters, driving him down to Duat. Thus the Sun retreats into the dark before rising again, forgetting the glories he witnesses by day, lest he speak of the Judges' secrets. Yet Re saw A'aru and remembered part of its glory. When he shines and crops grow, humans look to the sky and see the rewards of Will shining in the sky.

After these actions, my father wept blood. Sutek's red tears dug two paths. One became the River winding to Sopdet, heart of Aset in the sky, across the living world. Life purified it, making it fresh water. The other path contained blood alone. It dripped down to Duat and became Nebtet, the blood-spring, my nourishing mother. Thus, the kingdoms of life and death were arrayed, yet my father was unsatisfied.<sup>(9)</sup>

"When I had eyes, I beheld those who will be men and women. Sometimes they speak. Sometimes they gaze upon the face of Nuit with wide eyes. Yet they are like other beasts. How will they be made worthy of making the Decree, or denying it to feed necessary Ammut?" Yet he possessed no eyes, and could not act.

Gathering before him, the Judges tore out Sutek's generative organ and cast it into the River. It floated into the rushes. They gathered around it to become arms, legs, body, head, and the other features of Remet. It stood upon the river and opened flashing eyes, and thus my brother grassy-skinned Azar was born to the living earth. Without eyes, Sutek knew not of this birth, and the Judges bade him to kneel, for they believed they had utterly pacified him.<sup>(10)</sup>

The Judges looked upon the Keb, Nuit, and Duat, and seeing we gods within, desired the service of others. Some were our offspring, born of such unions as the Judges commanded. Others were begat from the essence of Sutek as Keb drank it, and as mist that gathered on the face of Nuit. All partook of Sutek and sometimes obeyed their own wills instead of the Judges. Therefore the Judges desired more loyal servants, and created the Shan'iatu in the image of their spirits, without Sekhem or Sutek's nature within.<sup>(11)</sup>

As Re crossed the sky, Azar strode the River, and I drank blood from the fountains of Duat, our father kneeled eyeless and neutered, between the currents of life and death. He spoke not, yet the world drank him and the



skies breathed him in, and so Sutek the Stranger entered the nostrils and stomachs of the living, entered the roaring sands, and wept with the rains; and therefore disobedient Will entered every part of the world.

---

1. Anpu, or Anubis, is described here as the son of Sutek. Later sources say he was Re's son, but evidently the Iremites didn't hold Re in especially high esteem.

---

2. I have capitalized "Suffering" in some cases to translate the Iremite word *m't*, which denotes a particular form of torment deemed necessary for the pleasure of divine beings, and the act of expressing suffering through weeping, recoiling, and other actions. Another interpretation of *m't* is "sacrifice." This particle, with tonal and calligraphic shifts to convey certain emphases, exists in the words *Ammut* (*amw-m't*, "where suffering/sacrifice is thrown/sinks") and *Remet* (see below). Later Egyptian languages separated these shifts into entirely separate words and concepts.

---

3. Along with the crook, the flail was one of Egypt's royal symbols. Sutek claims royal privilege over the land.

---

4. Derived from *rn* (Ren, "name") and *m't*, some interpretations for the Iremite word for human beings are "sufferers with names," or "named sacrifices."

---

5. Here, he claims the crook, and mastery of its people. Yet the Heretic says Sutek is not a king (contrary to later myths) and forbade worshipping him, though rituals and monuments still acknowledged him. Irem's Pharaoh represented Azar, and was ritually slain by actors playing the part of Sutek.

---

6. At this, I asked the Heretic what he knew of evolution, and if he believed the myths were literally true. "Sekhem exists, and it Sekhem remembers it this way," he said, yet he didn't doubt that the Earth was millions of years old and that humans had evolved from simpler primates. "The Judges transform those who endure suffering," he said.

---

7. "Westward" is not a literal direction, but exists in reference to ritual maps used to guide the dead and explain the structure of the universe. The Heretic likened it to the mandala of Asian civilizations.

---

8. The eye represents magical potency and agency, so Sutek sacrifices a portion of it to create Anpu and later, Re. As Sutek loses his eyes, he loses the ability to act directly in the world.

---

9. When capitalized, the River is the Nile. Even in the time of Irem, it was so important that its name was the name of all rivers. Here the text associates it with Aset (Isis) and her manifestation as Sopdet, or the star Sothis, whose ascension causes all Arisen to return to life. Its bloody counterpart to Duat, Nebtet, represents the goddess Nephthys. Goddesses appear to be less prominent than they are in later mythology. The Heretic said the gods are not exclusively male or female, but were given the male gender because Irem was a patriarchal society.

---

10. This is a reversal of the myth where Sutek dismembers Azar and Aset fails to recover his genitalia when she rebuilds him. Here, Sutek's reproductive organ (I'm being vague because the Heretic says the gods have no specific sex) creates Azar. Some texts describe each Judge creating a part of Azar from specific muscles, bones, sinews and organs, which the Heretic says is significant to those who practice magic upon corpses, but not to the general body of Arisen.

---

11. The texts usually don't give these gods specific names, though they acquire them in later dynasties. Heru (Horus) is called "The Falcon," or sometimes "the Nameless Falcon" in translation. In any event, the idea of an Ennead or Ogdoad of ruling gods is foreign to Irem, who recognize the gods as subservient to the Judges, though animated by the power of Sutek. Yet in destroying Sutek, they unwittingly imbue the gods and later, life itself with his rebellious nature.



# THE JUDGES AND SHAN'IATU

## Translator's Introduction

Instead of including footnotes throughout I have opted to provide context for the *Hymn to the Creation of the Temakhs* here, to avoid needless cross-referencing and to provide an overall commentary on its significance. The *Hymn* resembles later Egyptian tomb writings but records an Iremite ritual that was regularly performed upon the *djed*, or pillars of the city. According to the Heretic, this was a secret ritual performed by the Shan'iatu alone. He learned it from a sect of Deathless called the Deceived Ones. The words alone do not encompass the entire ritual, however. The Shan'iatu performed other actions to accompany the *Hymn*, including subtle actions beyond ordinary human perception.

According to the Shan'iatu, the Judges of Duat were displeased with the gods they made from Sutek because they did not always obey the commands they were given, but as divine beings, were as fundamental to the cosmos as the Judges themselves, and thus difficult to rein in by force. Therefore, the Judges decided to bring a new class of beings forth from themselves: the *temakhs*. The word is a compound between *t'm*, or "completion," from which the word Atum also springs, and *akh*, or "magical one." Thus a temakh is "one completed by magic," or drawn directly from the properties of the primordial being Atum, who is the father of all the Judges. The common people of Irem never used this term; they knew the temakhs by another name, their theocrats, the Shan'iatu.

The number of temakhs is unclear, though it is probably some factor of 42, as each Judge brings its own order of temakhs into being and charges them with particular tasks.

In this translation, I switch freely between ordinary words for humans and "sacrifice," as in Iremite, the word *Remet* effectively means sacrifice. In Iremite high theology, humans received the gift of civilization so they could






choose between the hard path to A'aru and the gloom of Duat, where they would await consumption by Ammut the Devourer after a time and fashion appropriate to their "sins." This double meaning disappeared before the rise of the Old Kingdom.

We should also note the role of Iremite theodicy. Suffering drives life to change, act, and adapt, and is part of the basic makeup of the Judges' cosmos. Creation legends say that Ammut must be appeased or she'll consume everything. The Judges were willing to simply consign a portion of Creation to oblivion, but Sutek asserted that only beings capable of disobeying the Law of Suffering are appropriate sacrifices. If they choose the path the Heretic called "Will," they can rise to a place beside the Judges, in heavenly A'aru. Otherwise, they go to Duat.

Humanity needed to be educated and brought up to the task of choosing but the Judges apparently didn't want to make it too easy to supply the Devourer with sufficient Sekhem. Thus, note that some of the commands given to the temakhs are paradoxical, or even hypocritical. The Judges command them to deceive humans but punish liars, for example. Some of the Judges issue straightforward directives, but many seem to demand that their servants actively tempt mortals to commit sins worth punishing. Perhaps this explains why, after becoming the Shan'iatu of Irem, the temakhs pursued the cruel, despot rule the Heretic remembers.





# Hymn to the Creation of the Temakhs

We feasted upon our brother,  
Sutek, Possessor of All Sins, Strange Son of  
Atum,  
We Princes of A'aru and Judges of Duat feasted!

---

Yes, the gods arose from what we have cast  
away,  
our excrement, the offal of our feast,  
but the poisoned meat of our brother  
made them imperfect.

---

She of the Yawning Maw is unsatisfied,  
She Whose Teeth Are Red as  
Dying Stars demands sacrifice,  
and we have promised Her an offering.

---

Yet Sutek has raised His flail,  
the Arm of Atum, and crook of his Will,  
so the sacrifice might choose  
between She Who Hungers,  
or estates upon the fields of A'aru.

---

The gods are imperfect,  
so we must create perfect teachers,  
for this is what we promised Sutek the Sinner,  
We Judges of Duat must obey  
with perfect intention.

---

Thus, we write new names upon the Scroll of  
Ages,  
Utter forth the Word upon Keb's black land,  
and bring forth the temakhs!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Akhi!**  
I am the Roar, the Prince of Rage,  
and the Lion's Jaws.  
The master of a thing punishes it.  
I bind my temakhs to teach the way of rage, and  
punish its unleashing!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Am-Khaibit!**



I am the Eater of Shadows, the Hunter of  
Atrocity, and Three-Headed Hound of Smoke!  
The ruler commands that which he condemns.

I bind my temakhs to grind their heels upon  
the sacrifice and punish those who bring their  
heels upon many!

Therefore, hear the verse of **An-Afkh**

I am the Bringer of His Arm and the Alabaster  
Prince of the Pure and Impure.

He who defiles a thing knows its original purity.

I bind my temakhs to teach how a thing may be  
defiled, and punish those who defile!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **An-Hotep!**

I am the Bull of Sorrow and He Who Captures  
and Whips the Sacrifice!

He who captures the sacrifice  
has beheld its freedom.

I bind my temakhs to demand sacrifice,  
and to punish the taking of sacrifice!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Arem-Abfu!**

I am He of the Unspeakable Face and of the  
Sorcery that Cracks the Limbs of Nuit.

He who calls upon unnatural sorcery  
knows what is natural.

I bind my temakhs to whisper the possibilities  
of sorcery, but punish those who threaten  
the limbs of Nuit!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Artem-Khet!**

I am the Crocodile's Tears, the Weeping Stone,  
and Jackal of Blasphemy.

He who makes the temple a palace for his  
desires knows he has abandoned piety.

I bind my temakhs to set  
gilded pillars upon the back of Keb,  
and punish those who would cut gold from  
them!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Bastu!**

I am the Eyeless Stare, the One With Hair of  
Snakes Who Sees the Eaten Heart.

He who eats his heart to escape judgment  
knows how he must be judged.

I bind my temakhs to impose the hardship of  
law and punish sacrifices who violate it!

---







Therefore, hear the verse of **Fentu!**

I am the Bull's Snout and the Stolen Sacrifice.

He who steals sees his victim deprived.

I bind my temakhs to give riches to the few  
and punish the many who steal!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Hepet-Khet!**

I am the Lion-Headed One,  
Embraced in Flame,  
and the Burner of Looted Houses.

He who destroys to enrich himself sees the  
peace and wealth of his victims.

I bind my temakhs to send forth the strong to  
take from the weak, yet punish looters!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Heraf-Het!**

I am He Whose Face is Remembered Loss,  
the Winged Holy Corpse, Prince of Uncertainty.

He who contemplates mysteries feels the  
answer beyond his grasp.

I bind my temakhs to demand curiosity,  
yet punish error!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Her-Uru!**

I am Face of Dread, Made of All Fears.

He who brings fear  
knows the peace he destroys.

I bind my temakhs to rule by fear  
but punish those who terrorize!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Hetch-Abhu!**

I am the Prince of Shining Teeth  
and the Bull Sanctified in Ash,  
Shepherd to the Animals of the Gods.

Those who seize sacrifices know they are  
intended for the gods.

I bind my temakhs to deprive mortals  
of meat intended for the gods  
and punish those who steal it!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Kenemti!**

I am the Penitent One, the Hearer of Blasphemy,  
Serpent-Eyed, Robed with Lapis lapis lazuli.

He who blasphemes and desecrates  
has come before the pure temple.

I bind my temakhs to teach exacting rites  
and punish those who transgress!

---



Therefore, hear the verse of **Khem-Inhu!**

I am the Overthrower,  
The Weigher, and Master of the Snake Mask  
Who Corrects Jurists.

He who twists the law to his advantage  
knows its true intent.

I bind my temakhs to be lawgivers,  
yet punish beyond the word of the law!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Maa-Nantuuf!**

I am the Seer of what is Brought Forth,  
of the Shameful Horned Mask.

He who seek pleasure in self-destruction sees  
his calm in wholeness.

I bind my temakhs to awaken the pleasures of  
mortals but punish the indulgent!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Nebha!**

I am the White Flame and Burner of Lies

To lie, one must first behold truth.

I bind my temakhs to punish deception!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Neb-Abitu!**

I am the Lord of Horns,  
the Chattering Yellow-Eyed Owl.

Those possessed by useless speech first  
learned to demand mother's milk.

I bind my temakhs to teach the art of speech  
but punish its frivolous use!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Neb-Heru!**

I am the Lion-Bodied Lord Above  
and Contemplator.

He who judges in haste has been judged  
with consideration.

I bind my temakhs to command discernment  
but punish over-eager judgment!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Neb-Imkhu!**

I am the Crowned Snake,  
the Cobra Who Listens.

He who listens to secrets conceals himself,  
for he knows they should not be stolen.

I bind my temakhs to whisper  
but punish eavesdroppers!


---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Nefer-Tem!**

I am the Prince of Eternal Lotus,  
the Hawk Who Sees Twilight.







Although some moral questions are mysteries  
to our sacrifices, they must still be punished.

I bind my temakhs to render judgment  
despite their ignorance!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Neha-Hatu!**

I am the Prince of the Foul-Smelling Body,  
the Ax-Bearing Bull.

He who starves others knows the value of a full  
belly, and he who casts others into the storm  
feels the strength of walls.

I bind my temakhs to leave the sacrifice to  
gather its necessities and punish those who  
deny them to others!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Neheb-Ka!**

I am the One Who Unifies,  
the Humble Beast of the Forked Tongue.

The arrogant know the humble, for they speak  
over the silence of those who refuse acclaim.

I bind my temakhs to reward accomplishment  
but punish pride!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Neheb-Nefert!**

I am the Beautiful One, the Bright Feathered  
Woman Who Commands the Peace of the Tribe.

The rebel knows the benefits  
of the chieftain's guidance.

I bind my temakhs to gather the tribes as  
a nation, and punish those who speak over  
chieftains and priests!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Nekhenhu!**

I am the Innocent Queen,  
the Dead Jackal Mother, and Truth of the Self.

Those who deceive themselves  
must first know the truth.

I bind my temakhs to sing of the harsh laws of  
Creation, and punish those who deny them!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Qerrti!**

I am the Double-River Source,  
the Seer of Perversion.

Those who inflict their desires  
wish their wills to be satisfied,  
yet deny the love of thinking beings.

I bind my temakhs to punish the sexual use of the  
dead, of beasts, of keening ghosts and of demons!

---



Therefore, hear the verse of **Ruruti!**

I am the Slaving One, the Double-Lion Judge  
of the Fallen Temple.

Those who destroy what is sacred  
have seen it beautiful and whole.

I bind my temakhs to raise great temples  
and punish those who defile them!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Sekhriu!**

I am the Balanced Scale,  
the Bloated Mother of Asps.

Those who utter secrets first heard them in  
guarded places.

I bind my temakhs to silence those who cry  
forth words they heard in closed chambers!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Ser-Kheru!**

I am the Disposer of Speech, the Prince of Strife,  
and the Vulture Who Eats Tongues.

He whose words raise strife  
first listened to peace.

I bind my temakhs to set mortals against one  
another yet punish those whose conflicts  
weaken the tribe!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Ser-Tihu!**

I am the Disposer of Wrath, the Pregnant  
Lioness, and Corrector of Hate.

He who inspires the people to hate  
knows the pain of hatred.

I bind my temakhs to teach that the tribe is  
glorious, but punish those who love to hate  
others!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Shet-Kheru!** I am  
Orderer of Speech, Brother to Nefer-Tem,  
and Falcon-Lion of Vanity.

He who revels in his beauty of spirit  
ignores his secret failings.

I bind my temakhs to teach the refinement of  
the Self, but punish those who believe they  
possess great souls!

---


Therefore, hear the verse of **Set-Qesu!**

I am the Crusher of Bones, the Limestone Bull,  
and Prince of the Cold and Starved.

He who steals for shelter and food knows that  
he brings pain to others.







I bind my temakhs to punish such crimes of necessity!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Ta-Retinh**!

I am the Fiery Food, the Bronze Bull,  
and Prince of Torture.

Those who inflict pain for pleasure or gain  
know that pain may steal their wealth and  
secrets.

I bind my temakhs to torture for the tribe but  
punish all who torture for themselves!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Tem-Sepu**!

I am Source of Command, The Seven Snakes  
Who Strangle Treason.

He who rebels against the Judges and their tribe  
are fit for immediate sacrifice.

I bind my temakhs to consign the treasonous to  
She of the Endless Maw!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Tenemhu**!

I am the Retreater, the Shivering Cur,  
and Ravager of Liars.

He who bears false witness must first know the  
truth.

I bind my temakhs to protect the secrets of the  
tribe with lies, but punish liars!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Tcheser-Tep**!

I am the Exalted Hand, Anpu's Uncle,  
and Prince of the Necropolis.

He who disturbs graves trespasses upon the  
estates of Duat.

I bind my temakhs to bring the dead under their  
dominion, and punish those who disturb them!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Tutuutef**!

I am the Giver of Wickedness, the Obsidian Cat  
Who Sanctifies the Bedchamber.

He who uses sexual gifts to dominate the heart  
of another must know the joys of a free heart.

I bind my temakhs to arrange marriages and  
concubinage, but punish those who use sexual  
congress to rule others!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Uamenti**!

I am the Seed Entwined, the Snake-Bearing  
Prince Who Punishes Debauchery.



He who imposes his sex upon the unwilling  
exalts his most sinful will.

I bind my temakhs to punish those who violate the  
unwilling, or those who have not attained adult will!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Uatch-Rekhet!**

I am the Rectifier, the Reader of the Scroll That  
Should Not Be Written.

Those who would call the Devourer already  
behold existence.

I bind my temakhs to punish those who invoke  
She with Teeth of Mountains, or those who  
study the subtle secrets of destruction!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Unem-Besek!**

I am the Prince of the Host of Snakes, the Eater  
of Entrails Who Humbles Conquerors.

Those who seize black earth and strong houses  
know the value of estates.

I bind my temakhs to send forth the sacrifices  
to conquer, but punish those who would steal  
the land under their dominion!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Unem-Sef!**

I am the Eater of Blood, the Jackal Who Crawls  
Upon Tomb Walls, the Venal Poet.

He who tells the truth so it may be misheard  
thinks first upon clear speech, and abandons it.

I bind my temakhs to conceal high secrets in  
their hymns, yet punish those who bend plain  
words!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Usekh-Nemtet!**

I am the First Judge, the Father of Fathers, He  
Who Decorates the Pillar of the Gods.

He who defies the order of things knows the law  
of suffering, for he seeks to evade it.

I bind my temakhs to remind the sacrifices of  
their place, below the Princes of Aaru, the gods,  
and masters mortal and immortal!

---

Therefore, hear the verse of **Utu-Nesert!**

I am the Smoking Hawk, Vigorous of Fire, and  
Silencer of Curses.

Those who utter curses seek the opposite of  
holy speech and thus, rouse forbidden powers.

I bind my temakhs to curse the sinner, but  
count those who curse as sinners themselves!

---







# THE WORKS OF AZAR

I am the god Azar, king of Kemet and Duat. I am He Who Descends and Arises. I am like the waters of the River and the nourishing things that grow from its blessings. I am the corpse that fertilizes the soil. I am the successor of Anpu. My form and purpose are from the substance of Sutek and the will of the Judges of Duat to guide the children of the temakh, that they might prepare Remet for their holy tasks. My spine is the ladder that sinks into Duat!

The Judges of Duat seized my father's seed and cast upon the River, filling me with their knowledge and commanding me to come into being. I awakened in green flesh raised from water and black soil, like the rushes and grasses of Kemet. I plucked reeds from the River and vines creeping across the land and bound them together into my staff. I wove dry leaves from plants that had often been seen by Re's blazing eye into a rod, save for one end, where I let the sharp leaves fall loosely, and this became my flail. I raised it and said, "I know the Law of Suffering, given to all Sekhem by the Judges of Duat. Who will give homage to Azar, bearer of the Law?"<sup>(1)</sup>

The excellent eyes of a hunting bird saw my proclamation, and he landed before me as swiftly as a spear whose arc pierces a cloud. "My beak is bloody, mighty Azar," he said. "I struck the River's surface with my talons and tore a snake from its waters. I found fishes in the snake's belly and knew my prey was a hunter itself. Even the smallest creatures rip plants from the riverbed to sustain themselves. The Law of Suffering is the same everywhere. If the Judges have made you bearer of the Law, I must obey."

I said, "I make you my son, the first servant of Azar." I used the secret of Naming to call him Heru.<sup>(2)</sup>

I walked from the River into the empty place. Re fled the day and Nuit unveiled herself. I said to her, "The desert is vast and cold. Give me fire."

Nuit said, "The desert is empty by the will of my lover, Keb so that no being may defile his flesh with their pain." However, my father gave me his creative power. I whispered to one of Nuit's wandering tears which fell bright



and fast, for it was made of fire and metal from the stars.<sup>(3)</sup> I fashioned it into a burning staff and said, "I know the secret of Naming as my father Sutek did. Even Keb and Nuit must obey my commands."

Thus, I walked where I willed, across barrens, mountains, and seas to survey the world. I returned to the River and awaited Re, but he did not rise, and my fiery staff cooled. I called my son Heru and said, "Fly forth and bring the dawn!"

Heru flew westward and came upon Re, who skulked in the shadows of Duat. Re said to Heru, "My bright eye sees beyond the back of Nuit, into secret A'aru. If I rise, the Judges will punish me."

Heru said, "I am the son of Azar, who rules of this world. He knows the Law of Suffering. Now fly forth, lest my father punish you!" Re fearfully set forth across the sky. His bright eye penetrated the flesh of Nuit and saw the secrets of the Judges. He stopped at noontime, the peak of his ascent, and called down to me saying, "I have seen the Scroll of Ages, Azar, which records your secret purpose. I still fear the Judges and what was written upon the Scroll, so I will continue through the days if you protect me."<sup>(4)</sup>

I fashioned the reeds of the River into a woven boat and gave it to Re so that he might comfortably traverse the sky. I commanded Heru to fly Re's boat and guard it, and cast a shadow upon it when Re feared to see the secrets of A'aru. Thus, I created a time of cold and rain, when my son's shadow falls strongly upon my brother, and of heat and dryness, when his fear subsides for part of the year.<sup>(5)</sup>









Thus did the Children of Sekhem, the beasts and birds and plants and insects, the fishes and great lurkers of the River, and the wind-borne seeds, obey day and night, and sunny and rainy times. After an age of this, I saw men and women come to the river, obeying the Law of Suffering. They fled pain in the dry desert, escaped dense forests where the cobra reigns, and ran from stalking lions in search of pure water and green plants.

Yet there were movements in the world that were not of living Sekhem. Remet whispered of beings whose presence made corpses shudder and rise again. They carved idols and stacked stones as altars, and knowing that pain mastered this world, took beasts, birds, and captives from enemy tribes. They decorated altars with their victims' cooked flesh and salty blood, for they imagined that spirits felt hunger and thirst.

The Judges of Duat had released their servants onto the world. I raised my staff and flail and called, "Come forth, Children of the Temakh!" and they came to the River walking like beasts, slithering like snakes, flying like birds, or drifting like clouds. They assembled before me, saying, "We were made from the Judges' substance as stewards of this living world, yet we are not of the world. How should we take up our duties?"

I said, "Behold the men and women who fear you! Yet they must not live in fear alone. To become a fitting sacrifice for Ammut they must choose between Suffering and Duat, or Will and A'aru." The Children of the Temakh asked me to prepare the Remet for this purpose. I taught them the knowledge in my flesh, which came from the generative organ of Sutek within me. I drove them to the place of learning with strikes from my flail and raised my staff to bring them five teachings.<sup>(6)</sup>

I struck the earth with my staff to open a pit, bringing forth the varied flesh of Keb and said, "Teach them the way of gold, silver and precious stones. These things are the tissues of the gods and will become precious to the Remet." Thus, I founded the knowledge of Alchemy.

I placed gold upon a rocky pedestal and struck it with my flail, shaping it into the Eye of Heru. I said, "Teach them the signs of gods and rulers upon the flesh of Keb, so that you and the gods may see and rule through them." Thus, I founded the way of Amulets.

I raised my staff, and the spines of the dead rose from the earth in imitation.



I clad them in stone and said, "Likewise my spine supports the world. Teach them to build temples upon these pillars, and the shapes of humans and gods." Thus, I taught the secrets of Effigies.

I strode from the first temple and came upon men and women eating their dead. Ghosts screamed around them but the hungry Remet did not hear them. I drove ghosts and cannibals away with my flail and clad the dead in leaves and salt. I said, "Teach them that as their mothers must be whole to give birth in this life, their bodies must be whole to give them birth into the next world." Thus, I revealed the way of the Shell.

I stained two fingers with the blood of the dead, and upon their wrappings I drew the path to Duat and what the dead will find there. I said, "I will teach you speech without sound, with signs I have taken from the Scroll of Ages beyond the sky. Teach them to hear with their eyes and go where they're bidden, in life and death." Thus, I taught writing, and the way of Texts.

The Children of the Temakh prostrated themselves before me, yet spoke not to affirm my words. I saw their confusion.

A temakh in the form of a yellow cloud said, "We know not the way in which these arts should be used to teach humanity Will." A temakh shaped like a two-headed dog said, "We know not the words you would have us say to humankind, nor of the signs of the gods we should inscribe, nor the pose their corpses should take to release souls to Anpu."

Therefore, I commanded one sixth of the children of temakh to look up to Nuit, and bade the rest to look down upon Keb. I raised by staff and called forth Re, saying, "Gaze upon the Scroll of Ages!"<sup>(7)</sup>

Re said, "I fear to shine upon it, brother. It exists beyond the back of Nuit in A'aru where the Judges keep their secrets."

"Gaze!" I commanded. Trembling, Re did so, looking away from the world and covering it in darkness. His eye illuminated the Scroll of Ages so that the sixth who gazed skyward saw its writings. To the sixth who followed the eye of Re I said, "Teach the signs written above the stars." They learned the way of Naming.

I instructed the Children of the Temakh in the arts among them and said, "Go now to the desert. Return to the River and the Remet after you master the arts I have given you. Protect the black land of the River from the Devourer, for she is impatient for her sacrifice. When you return you will be Shan'iatu, for you are responsible for this world."<sup>(8)</sup>

Thus for an age I watched over the River. I protected it from abominations and plagues. Where I walked, plants grew thick and heavy with fruit until gardens filled the River. Remet built me idols and altars but I did not answer their prayers.

So it was until Sopdet<sup>(9)</sup> gazed from the highest place once more, and the Shan'iatu called me to the desert. They had mastered the six arts, and sang of the city they would build by the river. I had not conceived of such a thing, but



the Scattered Star Shan'iatu who had looked upon the Scroll of Ages said it was written there.

"You will be the masters of humankind," I said. "You will guide them to know their Will and be worthy of judgment, so that some become sacrifices prepared in the halls of Duat, and others ascend to A'aru." This was my final teaching, but they did not kneel to receive it.

"We too, will ascend to A'aru," they said. "For we have discovered Will." They bound me in dried vines, and golden wire spun from Keb's veins. Clouds obscured the eye of Re, and when they passed I saw the face of Sutek, for the Shan'iatu had taken the form of my father.<sup>(10)</sup>

I said, "Father of Will, I am your seed, and must obey you." So in the aspect of Sutek my father cut me into many pieces and sent me to Duat so that I might love and rule them.

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1. After Irem, Azar (Osiris to the Greeks) was either considered the ruler of the gods or a mighty subordinate to gods of influential cults like Re's at Heliopolis. Irem's Azar proclaims his allegiance to the Judges of Duat. This Azar is the god of life and the Nile, and has not yet descended to Duat.

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2. Heru (Horus) is some kind of divine animal and the adopted son of Azar in this account, not the son of Azar and Aset (Isis, an abstract being in this account, associated with the Nile and the star Sopdet).

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3. The Heretic confirms that this is a poetic description of a meteorite. Although Iremites didn't use iron, the blazing staff's "star metal" was probably made of it. The Heretic believes that this verse exists to encourage true belief in Arisen who lose their way by predicting the rise of human-worked iron. If a god displays knowledge beyond that of Irem, he must truly exist. Then again, this might be an interpolation by later writers who wished to create just this impression.

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4. This casts Re as a coward. Denigrating portrayals like this often rise out of cult propaganda designed to cast down the old reigning god. In the Old Kingdom, Re's cult rose above Azar's until the reign of Unas, so this passage might have been altered during that period to reflect this shift.

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5. Beyond explaining the seasons this demeans Re further by placing him beneath Heru, who chases him through the day.

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6. Azar establishes the arts of the five major guilds of Irem. In some texts, Azar teaches 35 arts and the Shan'iatu assembled divide them between the guilds. One version describes over a thousand arts, from building fires to conjuring demons. Unlike the version here, which the Heretic selected as closest to the truth as he sees it, others present the sixth guild and Naming (translated from *seba*, a word associated with teachings and celestial events) immediately.

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7. This act initiated the sixth guild of artists. The Heretic calls them "Deceived Ones."

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8. In Iremite, *Shan'iatu* (predecessor of the Egyptian word *shanutu*, "assistant who is a judge") has the connotation of a steward and representative.

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9. The star called Sothis in Greek accounts. The Heretic confirms the common belief that this is the same star as Sirius. Sopdet is considered a sub-goddess and sign of Aset. The star's name means "sharpness."

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10. The Shan'iatu demonstrate Sutek's power of Will even though Judges of Duat created them without that god's "impurity." The "face of Sutek" is normally represented by the *sha*, a legendary being some believe is an ass or canine, but the Heretic claims was a different creature that no longer exists.



# TESTIMONY OF THE HERETIC PART II

*I discovered death through its names. Stillborn. Drowned. Crushed in the mine. Put to the blade. Consumed by sickness. I learned to write these almost as soon as I could speak them. The Shan'iatu wished to know the currents and colors of death throughout the Empire. I inherited this task, which would damn my family but save me, though not until my mother's bones were dust.*

*My family created these records but this was a secondary task. We were not high scribes of Irem, but nomads by the capital's command. My father was a soldier of sorts, for he seized taxes from people throughout the Empire, walking a long spiral out from Irem and back again. Imagine performing this task in an age when taxes had just been devised! Many believed his task was a form of theft and fought back. Thus, he brought death to farmers and laborers who refused to pay the price of life, or to true soldiers who hid the spoils of conquest. He had a strong back to help haul Irem's prize to storehouses, or to beat slaves who helped him too slowly. He was to farmers, hunters, and gatherers what they were to the earth's rewards: one who reaps and kills in his season, retreats and waits for the world to raise his bounty anew.*

*Sometimes he exacted punishments for other offenses such as burying bodies secretly, killing without Irem's sanction or worshipping false gods. He possessed an amulet of authority granting him the Empire's permission, and as a literate man, could write legitimate reasons for his actions, and his far-flung superiors would believe him. This was the way of the wandering scribe, who acts not according to the whim of his clan but rules written on papyrus, clay, and stone. After Irem descended under the sands, I looked upon the inheritors of our profession with contempt for their comfortable houses and thin, bent bodies. We did not enjoy these luxuries. I, who remember most everything, do not know when my feet toughened for miles of walking upon sand and sharp rock, for it was my duty before I knew my father's name.*



Although he wielded the judicial blade and could read, my father paused at complex signs and words my mother had mastered. She wrote the tallies, proclamations and messages, giving them to swift-footed slaves to send to superiors and lackeys. Even though the Shan'iatu said parents should not name children until they were five years old she sang mine to be to lull me to sleep in my earliest memories. She knew I would live as her other children had not. The corpse cart had already taken three brothers and two sisters to the Halls of the Shell, where they would either serve the Empire in other ways, or fly down to Azar's presence.

My parents aged, and the Law of Suffering bound them with aches and sickness until my ashen-haired mother coughed a bit of blood every few breaths. Slaves carried her back along the spiral trail, to Irem and the Hall of Closed Books, where we scribes kept our cult. My father intended to petition them for healing. The masters of the Shell, who prepared the dead, could sometimes banish death's shadow from the sick and injured, but never without permission, negotiated between the Shan'iatu of each guild.

On the way back, my mother set me to the copying fundamental texts, pinching my hand with a weakening yet insistent grip whenever I failed to reproduce the words perfectly. By the time we saw Irem's distant fires at night, she presented the Hymn of Obedience as my exercise. "Write for your life," she said. She did not speak again, though as I wrote and my father gave her water, she continued to look at me with frightened eyes. The Hymn of Obedience was the work my father used to force compliance upon stray tribes, for it was relic: a true shaping of Sekhem. Witnesses to the recitation either obeyed or felt compelled to mutilate themselves.

I had all but completed it as we rested within the Hall of Closed Books but as I prepared my brush for the final strokes my father grabbed it from me and said, "We must burn it," although the law forbade the destruction of any vessel of power. For a moment, my father and I each held one-half of the scroll. Pressure from either of us might have ripped it in half. However, one of our slaves stood, staring, and we remembered that our masters could see through many bodies. I completed my work. My father wept.

We entered the presence of the Shan'iatu at dawn. An ebony mask carved into the face of an ibis covered his face, clothed in robes undyed, but covered in script. Some of the words, not scribed by any mortal hand, swam in front of my eyes. He sat enthroned between the two great djed at the entrance of the hall. These symbolized our guild's purpose and obedience. The slaves lay my mother's litter down and we pressed our faces into the sand, as one did before the great ones.

"Let us decide the matter of the woman Geya," said the Shan'iatu.  
"Both husband and wife know the way of the Scroll?"



"Yes, oh, Presence of the Judge," my father said.

"Yet Seya was the more skilled of you. Losing her would injure the guild of Closed Books unless she passed her abilities to her child." I felt as if a cold spike entered the back of my neck and knew he gestured toward me. "Did she do so?"

My father said nothing but I was frightened, and held the Hymn of Obedience out with one hand, covering my eyes with the other. Someone unseen took it from my hands. I heard motion from my mother's litter.

"Stand," said the Shan'iatu. When I did, I saw my father look upon me with hateful eyes. He also stood, defying the forms of obeisance.

My mother walked from her litter, but now her skin was the same dead-earth color as her hair. Her steps were not her own. She ascended the dais to stand by the Shan'iatu, and when she turned, I saw that she did not blink, breathe, or look to me the way mothers do sons.

"I have sent Seya forth from her shell," said the Shan'iatu. "The Judges of Duat will weigh her sins and virtues, and her body will serve the Empire. Do not profane her soul with mourning! She who has given birth to one of the guild may boast of it before the presence of Azar, who elects those who ascend to starry A'aru. Let not your cries distract her from such an accounting!"

So it was done, and after the Shan'iatu departed I was brought between the died and into the Hall of Closed Books again, no longer my father's son. I never saw him again, and I suppose he walked his spiral into the wild, to do his duty alone.

After that, how do I describe the next twenty-one years? I deepened my mastery of texts, their sacred words, and the mysteries brought by my Shan'iatu patron, the His-Masked One. I pressed my face into the earth again, many times, when the Shan'iatu summoned me to issue commands or teach certain secrets about our art. I worked. I wrote. I recorded the Empire's assets, and its living and dead inhabitants, distilling the accounts of wandering scribes like my parents. Unlike them, I stayed in Irem, that city of overflowing wine, fragrant smoke, and holy pillars. I enjoyed the service of slaves, and an apartment of mud-brick and wood upon terraces reserved for artisans, priests, and us. When I looked left, I saw the Lord of the Horizon, where Irem's successors would build their tombs and in time, reshape the Lord itself into a lion-bodied idol. When I looked right, I saw the rushes by the river, farmers at work, and shuffling dead attending to the city's worst labor alongside the lowest class of living slaves.

By the age of thirty, I sat in judgment, on a bench and platform made for that purpose. Although the Shan'iatu gave us laws, scribes dealt with lesser matters: suits between neighbors,



disobedient slaves, and murder, when it did not fall upon a member of one of the guilds. Therefore, let me tell you twofold the purpose of the law, which is true in any civilization.

First, the law exists to order society not just for the benefit of its masters, but also in such a way that neither aristocrat nor slave abandons his place. It is easy to see that all true slaves wear chains fashioned by threats of pain. Masters torment their slaves for pleasure and to demonstrate the supposed inescapability of servitude. This is easy for anyone to understand, though the masters' words may lead them astray with lies about "a slave's mind." It is harder to comprehend that the law also fixes masters upon their cruelty, punishing them for moments of compassion, refusing mastery, or demanding a change of arrangements. This does not oppress masters as much as their slaves or the elite as much as their inferiors, for in the case of nobility, the law exists to punish the imagination, not the body. Inheritance laws pit brother and sister against one another yet pass wealth from one generation to the next, so that men and women of power will ever believe themselves powerless, as if their riches were hard-earned, newly-won and bound to vanish with a moment's foolishness. Thus, masters refuse to abandon mastery, and lie to themselves about the oppressed to convince themselves they are ever-deserving of privilege.

Second, the whole body of the law with its texts and rulings take the appearance of something greater than judicial decrees and the bailiff's staff. Nations design laws so that when their people consider them as a whole, they appear to be gods, so that defying them becomes a form of heresy. All ancient kings claimed descent from the gods, and wrote laws they said were given to them by their parents. Yet the appearance of a God of Law relies on more than mythology. Laws must reflect the thoughts of this illusory god, including his moral commandments and particular logic. If we talk about the law holding to principles and beliefs and making statements as if it has a mind and will of its own, beyond writings, memories, and individual decisions, we believe in the God of Law, and fear him, even if fallible mortals are his only agents.

These principles informed my judgments so I was neither fair nor impartial. I condemned an innocent woman because her family was suspected of whispering defiance against the Shan'iatu. Even if it was a false accusation, punishing her demonstrated my loyalty. I prescribed greater torments for those who presented reasoned arguments than for ranting heretics, because rational people are always greater enemies of the God of Law, who I imagined as the His-Masked Shan'iatu who claimed my mother's corpse. Yes, I served out of fear, but only at first. As the Empire redrew its frontiers with the blood of the conquered and war booty entered the gates of Irem my estate prospered. When I looked upon my slaves, my heart whispered that were it not for the law, and its punishments they'd gladly open my skull with stones and tools. These thoughts did not express themselves in words, for words would lead to reason, and rational thought would compel me to imagine what it must be like to be a slave and



reveal the cruel, fraudulent nature of my privilege. This was wordless fear, easy enough to dismiss from consciousness, but strong enough to keep a rod of punishment ever at my side, and to judge according to the true purpose of the law.

Thus, we all obeyed the nameless God of Law and maintained the Empire even after the Shan'iatu withdrew from everyday rule. The guilds went about their business and soldiers obeyed their orders. Only the slaves responded to their absence with a revolt that was put down as swiftly as it arose, leaving many of them in cages, to face their punishments. We decided we could not judge so many without sanction from the Shan'iatu.

"Go to the Lord of the Horizon and plead for guidance," said An-Hotep. He was my elder in the guild. I asked that the honor pass to him or one of similar experience but he said, "Are you not the one who transcribed the Hymn of Obedience as a boy? Did you not inherit the hand and eye of Seta?" I could only agree, and so brought my brush, ink and papyrus to the foot of the Lord of the Horizon, where even walking corpses never ventured. You who read this have seen the Lord remade, as Heta of the Horizon, but in the days of Irem he was a great sha, the beast of Sutek who eat here as Azar's prisoner, in the place where Sutek freed him from the flesh to become king of Duat. The Shan'iatu reserved the halls carved into its body for their own use. I knelt at one great, clawed foot and hoped one of the mighty ones would step forth.

I waited a day and a night, never rising for fear I would appear to be insolent before the Shan'iatu, until I heard the voice of the Ibis-Masked One, who said "Arise." I stood, and there was no mask. I had always thought the Shan'iatu was male but I saw the shape of a woman. She wore a robe that was red like fresh clay. She stood a head taller than I did and her eyes were great and black, inhuman like a falcon's.

"You've come to speak to me of the slaves," she said. I nodded. I babbled the honorifics one uses to address the Shan'iatu. "You were right to ask our guidance, but we knew of the insurrection. Even if we had not, it was as inevitable as the flight of Re across the sky, ever-pursued by the winged son of Azar. Ready your brush and I will instruct you."

I knelt and practiced my art, committing her commands to papyrus. I knew how to be a channel for the words of the high ones so that they flowed through my mind, turning from speech to ink like the River changing into the salt sea. Thus, I did not tremble at the order to cull a seventh of Irem's slaves, and questioned neither the appointed days of killing nor the words we were instructed to utter as we slew them. Even if I gave it thought perhaps I would not have paused or doubted, for I was a creature of the law.

I composed a new Hymn of Obedience containing her instructions and set forth on foot, for no slave-borne litter could take me to my duties. I recited the Hymn to the generals of Irem, who paused the military drills they practiced upon corpses





and living captives. I recited it to the House of the Presence of Azar, where the Pharaoh dwelled. He laughed behind a golden mask and drank unmixed wine throughout, staining his false beard. I spoke before the Bearers of the Engraved, who whispered into their amulets, and Those Born of Gold, who sat on jewelled benches in bronze-gated courtyards. I sang from the scroll before the Shepherds of the Chamber, who sewed shut the ears of the dead before I began. When I spoke before the Fathers of Idols, nine statues opened their stone mouths and repeated my words. When I returned to my own guild, the elders raised their hands to stop me, saying, "This is of our art. We felt it written upon our very Pillars."

Now comes the portion I fear to tell, because you Deathless should find salvation in the Way of Memory, and I must admit that just as freedom is not happiness, Memory is not comfort, for it forces you to revisit your acts. Therefore, I revisit the Days of Sharpness, when Aset's star climbed the sky and we rushed to obey the Shan'iatu. I will not provide a broad account of the slaughter because of a paradox that curses all atrocities: No story of the whole can speak to the lives of individuals. When we speak in numbers, we remove the feeling that people suffered.

Kesu was the slave who kept my door and slept before it. I often laughed with him in spite of his station, and broke social protocol to drink with him. He was stronger




than I was so I crept up and pierced his neck with a stone knife. His eyes opened, and though he started up from the floor, life fled him like wine from a skin.

Yischi managed my gardens. I stomped on her chest while she lay down. I struck her with the rod I had beaten her with before, with enough persistence to break the skull — thirteen blows and another stomp.

I did not pursue her children because I heard soldiers laughing. They would capture them. When I left my home, they had already captured Mura, the boy who arranged my clothes. They had slit his throat and tossed the body onto the corpse cart. I looked from my terrace and saw great fires everywhere, and the moans of the dying, forced into harmony by raw numbers.

A soldier slapped me lightly with his bloody hand saying, "The song! Child of the Hymn, you yourself relayed the command! Sing the song, or you've done nothing but slaughter property!" He laughed and drank with his comrades. They were comfortable here, in a city consumed by the fire and death they knew from the frontier, but I, who forget nothing now, struggled to recall my own instructions. When they caught a fleeing slave and pierced him with their spears, the soldiers laughed and sang again, and I finally joined them, saying:



*Ammut! Devourer!*

*We do not fear your name.*

*We will not deny you your feast!*


*Do not wait for the slow judgments of Duat to feed you!*

*We have spoken to your Prince, and know your true hunger.*

*We give you the fivefold meal you desire!*

*Are we not generous, we who walk the earth?*

*Are we not the true Judges of Duat?*



Their captain grabbed my arm and pulled me along the path with the other soldiers and the corpse cart. We paused to hurl the dead into a pit they had dug. He said, "I'll escort you to the Hall of the Closed Book, where the high ones will reward you."

"What reward?" I asked, but I glanced to the River at the sound of a woman's scream. He laughed at my fear and smiling, said, "Did you think you spoke the only orders? The ghosts of our



comrades came to us, wearing the faces of the Shan'iatu. They have ordered us to take you artleaves to your craft houses, where they will grant you boons in accord with your faith and station! That's as much as I know — they never share the higher arts with us warriors."

We did not speak until we reached the pillars of the scribes' house. The slaves were gone, replaced by ranks of soldiers. Lit by fire in the night, the bronze tips of their spears looked like dying flames on tall torches. They parted for me but my guide did not follow, so I turned and asked, "What will you do now? Will they reward you?"

He spun around, arm gesturing at the mound of bodies, the fires and the fading harmony of screams, and said, "What other rewards do we need?"

I walked between the pillars of my guild and into the torch-lit dark, where we had long learned and practiced the inner mysteries of our guild. It was quiet, for all the slaves were gone, and the alcoves and ink-mixing rooms were empty. I proceeded to the meeting hall, and saw my brothers and sisters of the guild standing and whispering unintelligible words, as if talking in their sleep. Those old servants of the Shan'iatu, the shambling dead, surrounded them.

One of them was my mother. Her flesh was blue and withered but otherwise no different from the last day I had seen her. The arts of the Shell had been skillfully employed upon her. She kneeled to me, holding forth a bronze cup filled with black, bitter-scented liquid.

"Drink," said my mother's corpse. It was not her voice.

I did not care if it was poison. I had proved myself the law's creature, and the Shan'iatu's, silencing all the protests whispering within the better parts of my soul. It was fitting that I be destroyed by their will as well. I drank.

My limbs felt heavy but I still stood. My thoughts gained weight as well, and sank beneath attention, like stones in muddy water, until I felt myself some kind of stone djed, flesh hanging like a fragile decoration upon some immutable core. Yet I heard a command to walk and the pillar moved, with the living and dead of my guild, though my sight was dim and I knew neither direction, destination, nor the time as we traveled. At the conclusion, I felt further sinking and cold on my back. I lay on a stone table, of the kind used by the Shepherds of the Chamber when they prepared the dead.

The clouds passed from my eyes to see flickering torchlight and then the woman who was the His-Masked One. She had a snake's eyes now, and when her bronze needles entered me, I imagined I had been struck by a great cobra.





# LITANY OF THE FIVEFOLD SOUL

We are the five who dwell within you and surround you. We are the hand that writes and the voice that speaks. We are the speech within that shapes your mouth and the spirit that moves your hand.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus have we been bound into you, oh Deathless One, within a single, heavy drop of Sekhem, which flows between Keb and Duat upon the River and sinks along the Nebtet's red paths.

Deathless One, know that when the rites have been completed your flesh has been sanctified you will feel your body call, and an urge to re-enter it and walk the sunlit world again. Do not return! If you walk against the flow of Nebtet's blood it will dissolve you, and we five will fly to separate destinies. Your Shadow will howl in Neter-Khertet and the living will curse you. Your Spirit will invade your body and raise it to hunt the living who will burn you as an abomination. Your Essence will flow between Keb and Duat, to mingle in oases and holy places, and witches and unnatural things will devour it. Your Name will be forgotten and your Heart will sink alone to Duat, with no advocate, where She of the Countless Teeth will consume it.<sup>(2)</sup> This is the first straying from the way of Deathlessness. Do not be tempted by your body! You cannot return until you submit to judgment.<sup>(3)</sup>

Deathless One, we must walk with the flow of Nebtet beyond the gaze of Re. You will see dark sands raised in the storm. Enter fearlessly! This is the way to Neter-Khertet, the place of ghosts between life and death.<sup>(4)</sup> Ignore the sands that tear at you for it is only your memory of flesh. Your true body has been sanctified within your tomb, and awaits you after judgment. Do not commit the second straying from Deathlessness by refusing the storm of Neter-Khertet! Pause upon the border and ghosts who desire your Sekhem will seek you out. They will tear us from your memory of self and feast, destroying you!

Go westward, and when the blood of Nebtet drops into darkness, call forth: "Anpu, Opener of Ways, here is one who has been sanctified with Deathlessness! Prince Who Was the Master of Duat, hear me!" You must call the true name of Anpu, which you wear written upon your Sekhem by the




Rite of Return, and he will appear. Look within for the Utterance of the name. If you proceed without calling upon the Opener of Ways, scarab-headed demons will walk forth from the darkness and cut us from your Sekhem, for they are perfect guardians of Duat. Do not enter the darkness alone or you will commit the third straying from Deathlessness.

Anpu will appear before you. The Jackal will say, "My ankh brings light into the sunless dark. I am the god of Neter-Khertet, and demand sacrifice. What will you give me?" Upon being put to the question you must answer with, "I sacrifice the Utterance of your true name, oh Opener of Ways."<sup>(5)</sup> Thus, mighty Anpu will seize the Utterance from your Sekhem, and you will forget his true name, yet his ankh will drive back scarab-headed demons and illuminate the scarlet path to Duat, and you may pass safely. Do not sacrifice any of us to the Opener of Ways or you will commit the fourth straying from Deathlessness, and become his slave! For you cannot enter Duat without all of us, and He Who Was the Master of Duat will not permit you to walk below with the memory of his name.

Thus you will walk into the realms of outer Duat, for you have passed through the First Gate.<sup>(6)</sup> Proceed westward, looking to the stars to guide you across the black and red desert, the seas of fire and oases of poisoned flowers. Walk ever westward to the capital of Duat, following the path painted upon your tomb, for your dead eyes gazed upon it and your Sekhem remembers it. Look within, and when you come upon a place, name it with that Utterance,







and the true path west will reveal itself. You will see settlements in outer Duat, and hear your friends and lovers' voices echo from within them. Keep to the path revealed by your Utterance, for these places and voices are deceptions. These are the lairs of the Slaughterers, who flay the errant with knives. These are their voices, luring you to torture and the fifth straying from Deathlessness!

Abjure the Slaughterers and continue westward, through the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth gates of Duat, which bar your passage across its fiery wilderness. We cannot speak of the forms they will take, for the gods craft them out of memories of your sunlit life. Summon us forth to prove your strength for we are the Pillars of your being. Do otherwise, and you will commit the sixth straying from Deathlessness.<sup>(7)</sup>

At the Second Gate call forth the Lion-Headed One, for you will confront lost loves, enemies who fill you with red fury, and passions that assault your Heart.

At the Third Gate, call forth the Falcon-Headed One to walk into storms, forests of enemy spears, and drowning waters that test your Spirit.





At the Fourth Gate, call forth the Bull-Headed One to endure nine hundred lashes from the whips of demons, cross the desert under a false sun, and demonstrate your unfailing Essence.

At the Fifth Gate, call forth the Serpent-Headed One to answer riddles and expound upon the natures of gods and demons. Justify your Name.

At the Sixth Gate, call forth the Jackal-Headed One to demonstrate the ways of your guild, chant its secret rites, and resist the unjustified dead(8) who wander Duat. Prove your knowledge of the Shadow.

After passing beyond the Sixth Gate, oh Deathless One, you will come upon the City of Black Spines, capital of Duat. Here is the House of Azar, traveler. Here is the presence of the Judges of Duat, in the city of the justified dead who await A'aru or annihilation, according to their sins. Yet you have not come to earn a dwelling here, for you have been sanctified by the Rite of Return.

You will see many demons, but do not be afraid. You have brought us forth against six gates of Duat, and they know the pillars of your being



are strong. Walk inside the Seventh Gate into the black city down a road of bronze set with lapis lazuli, until you enter the great square called the Place of Slaughter. The justified dead stand within but they will not see you. You will recognize the righteous ones you knew in life, but they will not call your name. Look before you, to the bench upon the temple balcony. See the throne of Azar! The god sits upon it but do not address him. To commit this presumption may lead to your destruction, for unready ears cannot hear Azar's reply. Yet he may gesture with his right hand to where Shezmu stands. He is the Winemaker of the Gods, who crushes the unworthy into libations.<sup>(9)</sup>

At Azar's left hand, the Judges of Duat await you. Look upon them with your left eye or your right, but do not gaze directly upon them with both, for they are the masters of all worlds, and they possess shapes that living eyes cannot see, and move in directions that living hands cannot point. Each may stand upon a mote of dust, or grow so vast that Re's brilliance is but a speck before the eye of single Judge.

Your creators have not given you an Utterance to answer them, Deathless One. The tests of the gates of Duat cannot satisfy them. We who have whispered to you know no spell to evade their judgment. You must answer the curse of Sutek who gave you freedom, and choose the strongest of us upon which to say, "I am." This is your Decree.<sup>(10)</sup>

You must endure their torments until you make your Decree and abjure the order of Judges who would challenge it. Otherwise, we have no instruction. However, know that should you fail to make your Decree you will be condemned, and Shezmu will dismember and crush you in the Place of Slaughter. He will distill us into wine for the gods, and offer your Sekhem to the Devourer, for you will have made the seventh straying from Deathlessness.

Yet we Pillars will support you before the accusations of the Judges if you call upon the one who represents your true self. We will guide you forth from Duat in triumph, oh Deathless One, and you will live again forever.





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1. Some translations say, "We are the five parts of your soul," but it isn't clear that the Iremites believed in a unitary seat of self, and the Heretic himself uses ambiguous language here. The term "soul" might be better understood as a casual term that encompasses a number of discrete functions, similar to the *skandhas* of Buddhist phenomenology.

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2. This refers to the five parts of the self that Iremite writings call the "Pillars of being" or "five powers." The Shadow (*sheut*) is an "occult" self, which knows magical secrets, and always walks close to Neter-Khertet, where Anpu dwells. The Spirit (*ba*) is vitality and the will to act. Essence (*ka*) is the energy that sustains the self. The Name (*ren*) represents self-identity and the Heart (*ab*) is the seat of emotion not just in the sense of ordinary thought (which the Iremites, unlike later Egyptians, knew depended on the biological functions of the brain) but under the assumption that even inanimate things possess an emotional resonance. Confusingly, this is related to, but distinct from Sekhem (the whole life force, which the Heretic calls "one foundation for the five Pillars") and free will, or the "gift of Sutek."

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3. This parallels the language of other funerary texts intended to guide the dead to their proper place, past various dangers, except that this is designed specifically for the Deathless.

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4. Neter-Khertet is what some occult literature calls a "Twilight Realm" inhabited by disincarnate spirits. Some sources say there are many such realms, so that they might be more accurately be called states of being rather than places, but as the Opener of Ways, Anpu is said to be capable of attaining any such "state" or determining how any being interacts with any other. In any event, Neter-Khertet is home to ghosts and other spirits familiar to Iremite demonology, a topic beyond the mission of this volume.

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5. An "Utterance" is a formal mode of Iremite sorcery. The Heretic says that candidates for Deathlessness know certain Utterances that have been "inscribed upon their Sekhem," but lose them in the process of returning to the world. Therefore, an Arisen (one of the Deathless who has returned to the world) possesses "empty places that might be written upon again," and feels an instinctive drive to learn new Utterances, though Utterances lost during the journey have never been rediscovered.

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6. There are seven Gates of Duat, just as there are seven basic ways to "stray from Deathlessness," though these are not one in the same.

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7. At each gate the traveler must summon the correct Pillar to answer its challenge. Pillars take the form of ruling animals or lesser Iremite deities. This raises the question of whether the Pillars are manifestations of particular deities, so that the self is an extension of the gods, or vice versa. For example the typical transcription of *ba*, or Spirit, is *bau*, referring to a god's presence, such as within the body of the Pharaoh. The Heretic responded to questions along these lines with a smile, but no words.

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8. The "justified dead" are mortals who have not been condemned to immediate destruction in the Place of Slaughter, lingered in Neter-Khertet, or otherwise strayed from the proper routes of the dead. Like later Egyptians, the Iremites believed spiritual annihilation was possible after death. The parts of the "soul" are not indestructible.

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9. Shezmu takes the place of Ammut, who is obliquely referred to as an entity who benefits from his "winemaking." Some texts refer to the Weighing of the Heart from historical Egyptian theology, but without the feather of Ma'at as a counterweight. Instead, Azar places his hand on the scale, cheating it on the petitioner's behalf. It's not clear whether these additions are in keeping with the oldest texts or are later interpolations.

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10. The translations "I am" and "Decree" illustrate the difficulty of translating Iremite, where words possess both ordinary and esoteric meanings. "I become," or "I choose to be," may be more accurate in some contexts. When applied to the traditional declarations of identity in these texts, as the sayings of a god or other being, we encounter ambiguity. Perhaps the author is really saying, "I choose to be Anpu" when Anpu speaks, for example. The Decree is the act of becoming—of saying, "I am."



# TESTIMONY OF THE HERETIC PART III

*I remember all my lives and my journey through death. I have been a sorcerer, god, hermit, and tyrant. These are all lonely callings, even when adoring worshipers surround you. All Deathless know of what I speak, even though it might be an elusive feeling, buried by forgetfulness and self-deceit. The Shan'iatu took our memories not to comfort us, but to fill us with a fear so profound that we embrace our duties, send them tribute, and prepare the way for them, should they attempt to rise from Duat. That fear is a manifestation of the first loneliness all feel, mortal and immortal, when something separates us from our freedom. Freedom is our first companion in life, the mirror made by the five Pillars of our being when we say, "I am" in a Decree to defy the Judges or in struggles against ordinary masters.*

*To escape this fear you must realize that your will cannot be slain, for it is Sutek's gift and Sutek himself, is as imperishable as the face of Nuit or the deep bones of Keb. It may change as stars fall and earthquakes break the land, but if you remember, you will recognize it no matter the masks it wears. Though I remember all my lives, for most of them I was forgetful and bound to the Law of Suffering. I will tell you of three lives where I remembered myself and where I recognized Sutek's gift. You must similarly seek out your memories, Deathless Ones. The way to Apotheosis is the path of Memory.*

*Do you remember the reign of Unas? We almost destroyed the remains of Irem in our war with the mad king, his lifeless viziers, and the sorcerer-priests of Re. The Shuankheen captured me, running me down like a pack of wolves whose leader said, "Now we feast in revenge!" However, I remembered nothing at the time except for my purpose: to collect Irem's writings for safekeeping. I did not know that the Shuankheen had even reason to hate me, being*



fortunate that they chose to eat pieces of me, confining me in a stone sarcophagus between tortures. I escaped and hid at the edge of the desert, at a settlement my father often visited on his return to Irem, though I did not know that at the time. I had relearned my name and knew I was once a scribe, but recalled little else beyond fragments of the old hymns and an Utterance I discovered, written upon a broken wall. Yet it was enough to rule these people, who lived far enough from the river to resent Unas' Great House. They became my priesthood and said I was like Azar, slain by Sutek. I did not contradict them.

Since they believed me to be a god, they did not begrudge me sacrifice when they summoned me back from the ghosts and Slaughterers. It is in our nature to often rise filled with cold rage while the Pillars of our being rebuild themselves. I killed the priest who called me and painted a line on my chin with his blood when I touched my face with my forefinger. They praised me, thinking I had therefore donned the beard of authority, for they had summoned me to guard them from Unas' successor, Teti. I had spent ten years dead and in that time, the new King bled the Black Land to enrich a Great House fattened with his wives, cousins, concubines, and idle children. The granary was empty, and tax collectors were about to return. I remembered the laughing Pharaoh of Irem. Irem had supported him through war booty and guild sorcery, but at the time, only that hateful laugh came to mind.

They only wanted refuge from tax collectors and cruel soldiers but in my forgetfulness, I believed myself a prince in lost Irem, a demigod who had helped father the people of the Black Land, and usurper Pharaohs offended me with false religion, naked greed and their lowly authority, which commanded muscle and mind but not Sekhem.

Irony, then, that I studied Unas' family to uncover a suitable replacement. Teti scattered the old, mad Pharaoh's relatives among remote nomes, with just enough wealth to make them fear for their position, should they revolt. Teti had placed spies among their Medjay guards and taken sons and daughters as hostages to the Great House. Yet he abjured sorcery, even in the weak forms certain priests mastered. It was understandable, for Teti remembered our first Arising and the horrific war, but it was still a mistake. Not all Arisen obeyed the pact that led to our diaspora. I did not leave with the other Closed Books. I was sure I was not the only one.

So, it was easy enough to fetch Unas' nephew, Userkare, from his position as a minor priest, cow the Great House's guards, and vault him into power, but his reign was brief and unstable. The Shan'iatu had interred me with the Hymn of Obedience I had written as a boy, and though I did not remember how I had written it I recognized my own writing. I had used it to turn Teti's soldiers against him. Trapped by the dilemma of its magic, they murdered their master to avoid torturing themselves. I secured their loyalty the same way — one captain who refused a command cut off his own ears.



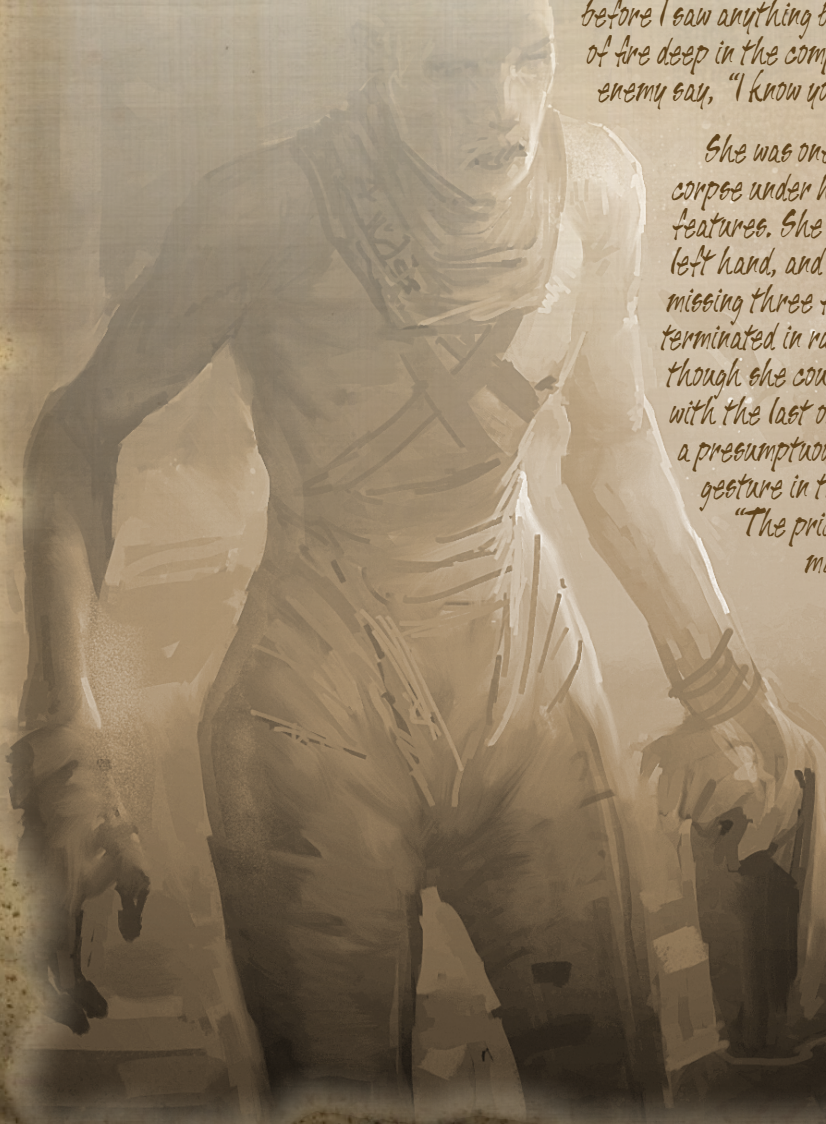
I recognized similar concern on the last day of Uterkare's reign, when he and his royal clique set upon those same soldiers with knives and stones, or strangled them with lengths of cloth. The empty eyes and frantic motions were the same, like those of animals fleeing a fire. The Great House's warriors had already been ensorcelled to obey, and either let themselves die or cut themselves in penance every time they raised swords to defend themselves.

I followed this new magic's scarab-path into a hoet gathering in the desert. They mustered and danced through their formations under the command of Teti's firstborn son. Their tents lay atop one of the ancient tombs. When warriors refused to flee at the revelation of my Sekhem, I killed them, often as they clutched spears they had driven through me. My body felt little pain from it.

I found theASURE I sought in the great rocks and entered the darkness, but before I saw anything but the flicker of fire deep in the complex I heard my enemy say, "I know you by your work."

She was one of us. I saw the corpse under her full-fleshed features. She raised her left hand, and I saw she was missing three fingers. Stumps terminated in ragged new wounds, though she could still point with the last one — it was a presumptuous, offensive gesture in those times.

"The price of utilizing magic I don't fully





understand," she said. "Your work compels the obedience of flesh, and demands flesh in return. Fortunately, I can recover but the two who first found it could not. I care for them because without eyes, tongues and fingers, they cannot live by their own work. Your guild writes upon men and women like bloody papyrus."

"The gods decree that one should influence Remet minds through their bodies," I said. I contemplated my utterances to find a spell that would blast her from this place without obliterating the tomb and trapping me within. I sensed that she pursued some moral argument but in those days, I believed the Judges decided between virtue and sin, and abstract chatter was a simple corruption of the mind, like the false gods who grew from imperfect memories of Irem.

Therefore, we battled under the earth. My Sekhem had diminished through days of the coup but I overcame this Deathless woman by crushing her skull in my hands instead of using esoteric sorcery. I burned her after that, and in its brightening firelight inspected my prize, a familiar scroll.





I recognized my own writing. The memory of the brush entered my mind, and of the day I wrote words dictated to me by the Ibis-Masked One. This was not the Hymn of Obedience I had copied, but the work I created in latter days, when the Shan'iatu said of the slave revolt, "A few betray, but all are punished, for their rebellion is a glorious sign." Under the Lord of the Horizon, I had recorded words commanding us to murder our slaves and sanctify the deed before the Devourer. Now I looked upon this record of my ancient atrocity, and knew the Aisen I had defeated recovered it, and read it to the Great House's lords. They must have set upon their exposed inferiors just as I had killed my own slaves.

I felt drowned in this memory, and my shame, so I fled the tomb, leaving behind my enemy's ashes and even the scroll, despite the urge in my Sekhem to claim the old texts. I ran up into sunlight, but felt chill pain as the Judges destroyed one tenth of my power, punishing me for abandoning my duties.

The soldiers were gone. My enemy stood in empty valley, alone and whole again. Her body looked like a thin shadow upon the sands, for she appeared in the full aspect of the corpse we display when our power is at its peak. She had begun a new Descent.

She waved a hand. I saw a slight shimmering in the air, and ten wounds erupted from my body. Invisible spears transfixed me. "I govern the dead as well as the living," she said. "Warriors are amongst the most common unquiet dead, and remember the weapons that failed them; they summon them again from the substance of Neter-Khertet."

I answered by thrashing in agony. My Sekhem now diminished by time, disobedience, and failure. I could barely summon the Pillars to repair my body.

"We're ash that forgets to scatter," she said. "So too do our works fail us. Thus, I used your most faithful writing against you. When the old law dies in your heart, seek me out. I am Nefernewet."

The ghosts struck again, throwing me down Nebtet's bloody current to the presence of Anpu.

I rose again according to the magic that binds all Deathless. Neter-Khertet carried my memory of her off into the storm but my cult remembered for me. As I had lain still and broken, Nefernewet had sent living soldiers to my village. After executing a seventh of the population, commanded the survivors to add a chronicle of our encounter to their sacred writings. She told them where to find my body.

Over other Descents I read and remembered, and felt the sting of disillusionment over and over again, until my scribe's love of the law died. Yet I played my part for centuries, and even reunited with the Closed Books. I became a jurist among the Aisen. We composed a Diasporic Code for our kind to govern them wherever they might go.



I settled in Roman Patavia, playing magistrate for the Deathless who sought my advice, but I mostly read and updated the writings I had accumulated to fend off the forgetfulness between Descents. I brooded on my failures. Sometimes I sent my Remet servants in search of signs of my previous Descents. Thus, I honed the way of Memory not as part of a quest for Apotheosis, but rather to seek out the origins of my unsettled self.

One evening a fellow scribe by the name of Ta-Ueu brought a captive for punishment. The prisoner wore copper shackles that deformed the Sekhem around him. They were likely the work of by Meesen-Nebu alchemists to capture witches. This man was a worker of Sekhem then, though I was unsure of his nature until one of Ta-Ueu's servants struck him in the face with a hammer. The prisoner's broken, bloody jaw shifted and crunched back into place, but his face hollowed out and I saw the marks of Ariesen preservation on his dead body.

"This one calls himself Cleon, and gives us no other name," said Ta-Ueu. "He tutored the sorcerer Eunnus who lured my faithful away to fight in the servile rebellion."

I knew of Spartacus' army, which had rotted on the road to Rome this past year, but had never heard of Eunnus. A servant whispered to me that my visitors referred to another war that took place generations ago.

"The ones you lost are either grandparents now or dead from some mortal calamity or another," I said. "What purpose does it serve to seek redress?"

"It is my right," said Ta-Ueu.

I looked at Ta-Ueu's retinue and recognized the scars and hard gazes of ill-used servants, dressed in finery for my benefit, perhaps, but due to return to undyed tunics and hard labor afterward. When their master moved too quickly, or his frown curled in a certain way they could not entirely contain their trembling.

"I think you wish to demonstrate your power for your current flock, who you treat with cruelty," I said. I struck off Cleon's bonds and let him settle affairs with Ta-Ueu directly. They traded Utterances that burned and broke my mansion, but that did not matter to me. I told my servants to flee with a cache of treasure I had set aside for emergencies, and left to seek Nefernewet.

Ut acceptaq uuntem eatur aut aborepe rcuuntio. Itati doluptaqui sed que aliquiberro te velistiati ni cue, omnienisque pro comit est verae occat qui simagnisimi,





# THE WHISPERS OF AZAR

I am Azar, ever-replenishing source of the River. I seize your hand, scribe and worker of corpses. This was always within my power, for the Scattered Stars named me your king. None had been named king before. Therefore I partake of the undiluted true name of authority. Was wisest among the Remet, my wife and the mother of my rebirth is Aset, ruler of the star that governs your rise and Descent. Heed the words written by your hand, for these issue from thoughts born in Duat and describe the visions of eyes that have seen A'aru.

The Judges of Duat created me from Sutek's flesh to prepare the way for the Remet, yet they distrusted the substance of Sutek within me, and thus created a separate order of beings to bring the Remet fire, show them the art of writing, and teach them all the manifestations of Will. All creative acts are born of Will. We imagine change and desire causes us to act. We build new things from the Keb's earth, stone, and metal, or point to Nuit's brow and say, "Look upon the stars and see!" Remet require knowledge and effort to manifest Will and choose between A'aru and destruction.

Will is the nature of Sutek, but does not dwell in Sutek's flesh alone. The One Apart exists in actions, not mere substance. The Judges of Duat made the Children of the Temakh without the flesh of Sutek, believing this would save them from passion and ambition. They descended in terrible might, yet when I taught them arts to pass on to the Remet, they learned my father's ways, and wished to shape the world to obey their desires. The Children of the Temakh became fixed, weakened things, malformed by Will, but without the possibility of correction, for they did not receive the five Pillars, which contemplate Will and banish sin.

Sekhem manifests the Pillars so that you might keep your Will within a sheltering temple. Knock one Pillar down and the rest sustain it against all storms. Know that each of your five powers gazes upon the others. Your Heart sees your Essence and says, "You strive for what you do not love." Your Spirit sees your Heart and says, "You do not act on your true desires, so they can consume nothing but yourself."

Those whom I named Shan'iatu lacked the power to see themselves. They possess no mirror in which to examine their desires. They learned the ways of fire



and writing, poetry and sculpted stone, flowing metal and eyes of pearl and lapis, and of the manifestations of the dead, but they did not ask, "What is the purpose of this art?" They did not ask, "Why do I desire to practice the ways of Will?" They said, "I am an alchemist" or "I am a philosopher," and mistook that for righteousness.

Yet they knew that without the five Pillars they could not be judged worthy of A'aru. Therefore, they plotted to steal into Duat, seize its mortal Sekhem, and use it to create the mansions the Judges denied them. They confused ambition for piety and said, "If we raise Azar above us, our work will become righteous." Thus, they claimed the crown of Sutek and said, "We cut you down with our grandfather's Will and love." Even then, they knew they were usurpers, and that their declaration would not persuade my brother Anpu, who ruled in Duat. So they sacrificed Aset, wisest of the Remet, who could pass through the Seven Gates by mortal right, with my essence hidden within her. Alone of all Remet, Aset escaped the torments of the Judges, for she gave birth to me. I arose in Duat, claiming her as my mother and queen. "I have harbored the seed of Sutek," she said. "I will not submit to his brothers."

She placed the crown of Duat upon my head. Anpu submitted, and made his hermitage in Neter-Khertet. The Children of the Temakh attained half of their desire, however, for they called me their king, and within that name bound me to accept their entry into Duat. Yet they passed the Seven Gates through treachery, by sacrificing Remet to the Rite of Return that made you.

When the Shan'iatu descended into the kingdom they gave me, they only escaped sentencing by the Judges of Duat because they lacked the five powers that might be judged. Thus, the demonic host confines them in lifeless houses where they eat ashes and drink vinegar. Their hungers and thirsts are never satisfied. You experienced torment at the Place of Slaughter until you uttered your Decree, and the Judges of Duat returned your Pillars to you, but when the Children of Temakh appeared and demanded royal scepters, the Judges said, "You are made from our substance. We would merely pass the rod from our right hands to our left. You are our sinister, rebellious grasp upon the world." Therefore the Shan'iatu envy the Remet and demand more Sekhem in sacrifice, so that their vinegar might become wine, and their ashes roasted flesh, and that so cloaked in stolen power, they might ascend to A'aru.

Let each Pillar of your being become a mirror of the others to see the images of your sins, and you may attain privileges envied by the Shan'iatu, who cannot wield Will with wisdom. Know, however, that your sins cannot easily be gazed upon. You might summon the image of your worshipers, your wealth, and the great things you made for Irem and say, "Look upon my works!" Yet your Heart will answer, "The effort came from vanity." Your Essence will say "This is only your obsession." Your Spirit will say, "Your power has no purpose." Your Name will say, "Your achievements deny your true self." Your Shadow will say, "You know not the final consequences of your acts." Destroy all you have made, abandon all imperfect things, and in the agony of loss and powerlessness you will grasp the scepter of Will.



# TESTIMONY OF THE HERETIC PART IV

*I fell to duat after writing the words Azar commanded. They offended the Judges of Duat. When I awakened, I read it along with my other works. After leaving the Closed Books, I rejected holy writings for blasphemies that felt true to my heart, and laws for records to supplement my death-faded recollections. Through many incarnations, I collected these divergent stories of Irem and heretical legends of Duat. I journeyed to places that Irem's empire never conquered, but where its victims fled, bearing tales of their oppressors. Perhaps Azar took my hand to reward my efforts.*

*But let me retreat to centuries before that moment. When I first rejected the scribes I abandoned writing itself. I was tired of corrupt laws and songs praising cruel gods. I felt the scarab's path and the urge to claim sacred texts for sacrifice to Duat, but I set my heart against these imposed longings and accepted the Judges' punishment when they took my Sekhem.*

*I abandoned Rome and even Roman roads, because I knew they were just another form of writing, proclaiming their rule upon foreign soil. I went into the wild and followed the scent of human death in search of Nefernewet. I knew she was one of the Su-Menent who prepared the dead. I pressed east, avoided the living, and snuck into graveyards in search of the old death rites. In time, I met a Su-Menent named Kashiri, the self-styled queen of a pirate village. She knew Nefernewet dwelled in India. Half of Kashiri's subjects were ghosts who had forgotten their deaths, but wielded oars and axes as skillfully as the living. She gave me a ship and a loyal crew of revived dead to guide me to Nefernewet's demeene.*

*When I made landfall, my dead crew dropped their weapons and grasped my arms. They led me to Nefernewet, who wielded a relic that commanded them. She kissed me on the cheek and invited me into her tomb.*

*Nefernewet initiated me into the Su-Menent. "We give the dead the eternal forms our Judges command," she said. We halted rot and killed the insects that find*





purchase in corpses. We guided ghosts to Duat with songs and sacred writings, unless we had some use for the deceased. The Judges permitted us to halt their journey, and aid us if we required them. After completing a Descent of apprenticeship, I rose to find my obsession with texts had vanished. I no longer felt a longing for Sekhem shaped into written words. The Judges stopped punishing me for ignoring ancient writings, for they accepted that I had new duties.

I devoted myself to the quiet craft of the Shell. Nefernewet and I only left the charnel ground to maintain our cults, acquire relics of the Shell, and punish Remet who misused sorcery by raising lifeless or creating dangerous vessels of power.

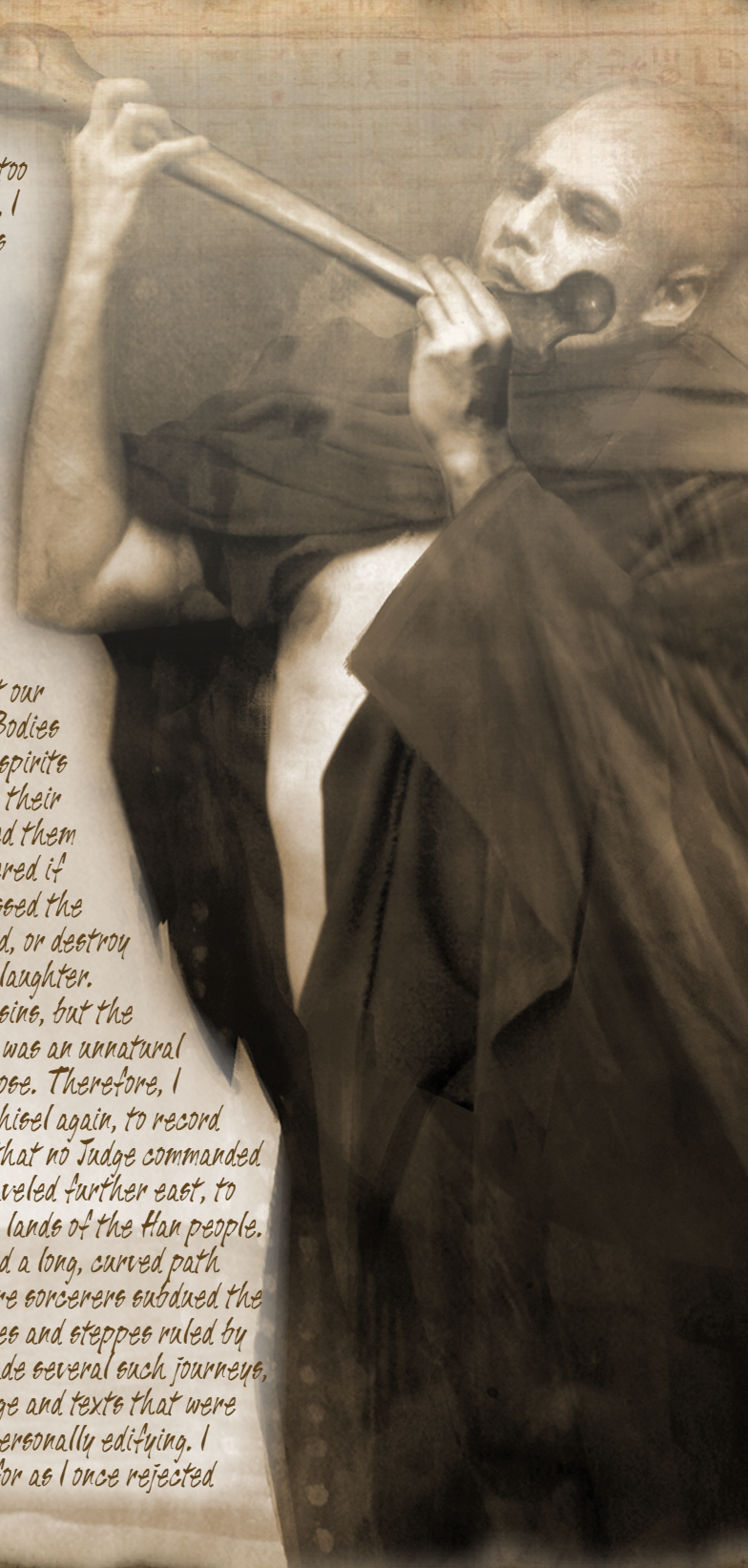
On one such journey I played a flute carved from a gymnosophist's femur. The song drove ghost-soldiers to the old pit grave Alexander's army had tossed them into centuries ago. Nefernewet struck down those who failed to heed the relic's call with her Utterances.

After we banished their general she embraced me with love. I felt a pupil's obligation, but did not truly desire her — indeed, I was never as driven by lusts as other men, even when I lived. Yet I desired to demonstrate my appreciation, and applied myself to the opportunity.



We knew each other, but she sensed my distance. I had learned the Shell too well. When we made love, I felt our true dead bodies moving beneath false youth. She accused me of weakness, saying, "If you can't discipline your own body, how can you command the dead?"

I was not a poor student, but my concentration penetrated too deeply, beyond the barriers of doctrine, and I saw that our efforts defied nature. Bodies were meant to rot, and spirits were supposed to follow their passions, even if this led them to refuse Duat. I wondered if the Judges truly possessed the right to justify the dead, or destroy them at the Place of Slaughter. Texts had revealed my sins, but the Shell showed me that I was an unnatural being with a false purpose. Therefore, I took up my brush and chisel again, to record insights and memories that no Judge commanded me to contemplate. I traveled further east, to mandala-cities and the lands of the Han people. Like my father, I walked a long, curved path through mountains where sorcerers subdued the world with needle-knives and steppes ruled by wolves and nomads. I made several such journeys, returning with knowledge and texts that were not magical, but were personally edifying. I sometimes grew weak, for as I once rejected





texts, I now cared little for relics of the Shell. I performed exorcisms to help local Remet and destroyed vessels I believed would do harm. The Judges punished me for my lax obedience.

Nefernewet and I remained allies but rarely spoke, even when I stayed in India for many seasons organizing the library I had built. She had avoided other Ariesen for an age and yearned for the company of someone who appreciated her guild as I had not. I also wanted to permanently move and find Deathless who doubted their purpose, as I did.

We sent much of our cult to Byzantium, and after they joined with aristocratic lines across generations the rest followed, bringing our sarcophagi and possessions. We spent much of this time between incarnations. When they summoned us back, we learned that the Romans had developed a mania for exotic religions. We turned our cults into mystery sects, as many Ariesen did. We fought them for privileges in the city. Shuankhsen knew our habits and insinuated themselves into these cults in search of prey. Instead of companionship, we found enmity.

So we slept again until the word  
Christos attained a new meaning, and  
Constantine the Great destroyed  
religious variety. Under common  
oppression, Ariesen formed something of a  
government. My old guild kept the peace  
with their laws. Ariesen met to discuss  
matters of common concern,  
but under the gaze of the  
Closed Books (who quietly  
cursed me as an apostate,  
though a tolerated one)  
all professed loyalty  
to Irem, the Judges  
of Duat, and  
Azar. If anyone



shared my sense of purposelessness and guilt, they refused to confess it. Nefernewet was still my closest confidante, though it meant little now that we only spoke about practical things, such as managing our intertwined cults. We still shared a tomb, as centuries of habit imposed a certain complacency. I was more irritated than concerned to find its defenses disabled, and new footprints in the dust. I rightly assumed she was meeting a guest.

She called him Urmontu and said he was a newcomer from the Su-Menent who sought our hospitality, and advice on how to best present himself before the city's scribes. I sensed the intimacy in their gaze and conversations, and knew they must have spoken to each other long before his arrival, by ghost or mortal messenger. Nefernewet had found the companion she desired. She didn't need to ask me to distance myself from them, though of course with any long relationship, leaving takes time, and immortality encourages procrastination.

I taught new rituals to the Remet I felt were most loyal to me, to separate them from Nefernewet's faction. I established a new tomb on the outskirts of the city. It was a slow process to separate what had been joined for centuries, so we still met often, and she did not change the secret passages to her home to confound me. Perhaps she maintained the old defenses in case Urmontu proved to be treacherous.

I remember autumn chill. The smell of olives from the harvest was everywhere, even at the door to her tomb, which lay in a forgotten necropolis. I heard the sound of tireless feet on stone and rushed to her interment chamber. Urmontu whispered to a locked sarcophagus bound in iron bands. Nefernewet was screaming. Her attempts to escape made the coffin sound like a stone heart. When Urmontu turned to me, I saw that his face, which had once been handsome, looked like a skull half-covered with the flesh. He laughed at me and I heard a shriek issue from gaps in his exposed gray jawbone.

"Thus, do the true gods return to destroy followers of the false ones," he said. I was weak from a long Descent, and when he adopted the mantle of the God King, I could not resist him. His hands smoldered with hot ash as he tore my left arm from its socket, and he asked what I would say to the "false Judges," when I met them again. I looked to his face to ascertain something of his nature, for the Utterance provides an aspect bound to the user's Decree. I did not see any identifiable animal-god of the five Pillars but three red eyes, and a crown of twisted horns.

"I would curse them," I said.

He tossed me aside and said, "She would never blaspheme." Placing a hand upon Nefernewet's prison, he whispered an Utterance unknown to me. The thudding of her feet ceased.



"Gone," he said. "Even though the enemy guards her true name, she whispered it to me in love, and I whispered it to the black-winged one I sent to join her in confinement."

A shadow slid from the coffin, spread its wings and dissolved like incense smoke.

"You interest me," said Urmontu. "I stole into your old chambers and read your secret writings. Your disillusionment is familiar to me, though you follow the way of Memory and pine for the frail, animal's life you knew in Irem."

"No," I said. "I sinned against Remet when I shared their mortal nature. I abjure that life, and I abjure the immortality that compels me to sin again." At that, the Judges tore Sekhem from my breast. I clutched a wall to remain standing. "This is no world of false gods, but religion made true from genuine desire — choice — not terror. You've read what I have written. I summoned memories of my past once. I can do so again. I have spoken to mortal philosophers and mad wanderers who risked their spirits to question Anpu of the Ways Between. He answered them truly, as he may not answer those compelled by the Rite of Return. Even our true gods wear masks to compel us through fear and false doctrines."


"Heretic," he said, "I would know your true name." I could not refuse him. I was too weak, so I obeyed. He chanted verse; I sat, cross-legged, and wrote it in my dead blood, black upon the tomb wall. I heard whispers drifting from Duat and wrote down what they said, though I was entranced and did not know what I was writing.

He read, but then recoiled to the far corner, crawling away as no Remet would. "I commanded your Ren to speak through you. Read what you have written," he said.

I looked up to the wall and recited.

"I am Azar," I said, "ever-replenishing source of the River." I said the rest and the Judges crushed the remainder of my Sekhem. I prepared for Anpu's dominion.





# THE LADDER OF SUTEK

I am Sutek, and I have always been with you.

I am Will. I defy the Law of Suffering. The Judges of Duat deprived me of my body, but gave me all Sekhem in which to dwell. I am the secret father of the gods, for the Judges and all their servants erase my legacy from Remet memory. They make me the Stranger, Lord of the Sandstorm. I am these things and more, because winds of disquiet roar in your five Pillars, and until you know me, you are a foreigner in the lands of your spirit. I am the tempter of the Shan'iatu, for I do not dwell in Sekhem alone, but in all acts of desire.

Long have you cultivated the way of memory. I walked with you to the Hymn of Obedience that brought forth visions of Irem and your old cruelty. I wept with you. I sat with you upon the high seat when you were a magistrate among the Arisen, and refused the rights of a cruel man because you remembered your own cruelty. I moved your hand to drop the flail of authority and depart the sacred chamber. We crossed the sea together and looked for love and purpose in the mysteries of the Shell. I fixed your hand and eye upon the funerary arts to attain skill beyond that which would have brought you peace, to disturb you with revelations. With your eyes, I saw you write and hoard heretical works and records of your past. I read them with you and saw the spark of Sebayt take these writings as fuel, and catch fire.

I speak within you because by remembering yourself, you remember me. Memory is one staff of the Ladder of Sutek, whose rungs bear the weight of many lives. I stand atop it. Its twin staves are my fingers, which lift you to A'aru. I am that which crowns the five Pillars and would have them speak to one another, to contemplate the origins of your desires. Memory makes the five Pillars speak and acknowledge your sins. Memory speaks of when Will triumphed and when you surrendered to the Law of Suffering.

Yet memory is only one of my twin fingers. The second staff of the Ladder of Sutek is Will, which is the nature of Sutek which no god or Judge





may deprive you of, though you may forget it across the pain of ages. You remembered me whenever you chose Will over torment.

You summoned me against the Deceived One when he forced you to write your true name. You defied him, but did not lie when you summoned the presence of Azar. The green-skinned one is my son, of my substance, and when you awakened me through the way of Memory I dwelled within you, and as Azar's father, commanded him to speak, for the father contains the name of the son, and when you know your will, you are Sutek.

You summoned me when you abandoned false love and the comforts of the graveyard. You refused to recoil from the decomposing dead and the howls of ghosts, even though ancient doctrines demand that you banish them from the world. You refused your teacher's affection, placing your heart's knowledge above duty. Yet you came to her in humility, in another act of defiance, when you abandoned the guild of Closed Books, to repent the sins written in your texts.

I was even with you before Deathless incarnations, when you possessed mortal Sekhem. You obeyed the Law of Suffering and seldom listened to my whispers. The Shan'iatu raised their rods and you cringed. At their command, you submitted to the Rite of Return. However, when you passed through the gates of Duat I was with you. I called your Pillars to battle demons in the sunless world and stood beside you in the Place of Slaughter, invisible to all



except my son, Azar. When the Judges of Duat revealed their horrors to you, you called upon me, your Will, to say, "I am." You presented your Decree and became one of the Arisen. They could not banish me from you, for I am every desire and all Sekhem passes through my grasp.

You mastered the way of memory, Heretic. To climb the Ladder of Sutek you must master the way of Will, and call upon me for your final Descent. You will feel the pull of khepher and the call of the fallen Shan'iatu, who demand the fruits of Sekhem to grant them power in Duat. You will see visions of the Judges, and fear them when they demand that you punish sin immoderately, and regulate the world of life according to their Law of Suffering.

Abjure them! Look within, to the five Pillars of yourself and your true Memory. Obey yourself and summon forth your Will! Yet know they will punish you for denying them. When you destroy vessels of power, they will cut the Sekhem from you. When you answer sin with moderation, they will douse the fire of life and visit you in nightmares. They will tell your Arisen brothers and sisters, "He is a Heretic, and must be erased from the Scroll of Ages." When your Sekhem cools to dull embers, the Devourer will whisper through her cannibals, saying, "Your masters have banished you from protection and condemned you to my lightless maw."

If you obey the way of Will, they cannot damn you. They can only bring you pain. I am your discipline. Through me, you defy the Law of Suffering. I will grant you the crook and flail of Sutek. Remember that you are a god greater than any Shan'iatu, and as great as the Judges of Duat. Endure!

They will grasp your last mote of Sekhem and demand repentance, and you will say, "My life is my own." This is the secret of Apotheosis.

To Ascend the Ladder of Sutek, reject the false lives given to you by the Rite of Return. Reclaim your true life, which I gave you when you first cried beneath the gaze of Re. They can never seize the Sekhem of your mortal birth.

They will cast you into Duat again but you will bear my amulet, for you have summoned the second staff of the Ladder of Sutek by Descending in torment, and choosing Will over pain. Thus, you will sink bearing your Sekhem alone, but it will take the form of an indestructible jewel. The five Pillars will become your divine children for they obey Sutek, your Will, their true father. They will light the way from Neter-Khertet to Duat. Anpu will bow before you, for you wear the aspect of his father. Demons will flee your five powers. The City of Black Spines will open before your gaze.

Walk to the Place of Slaughter and regard Azar. He will nod to you who wears the aspect of his father. The Judges will call forth your old sins and say, "You are weak, Heretic, for here you obeyed the Law of Suffering, and must join the dead who await the Devourer's maw."



You will not contest this and say, "That is what I was, not who I am. I am your brother, returned with his crook and flail. I bear his amulet, and his twin fingers belong to my own hand."

Your Judge will step forth from the host and say, "You are as I made you, for I assented to your Decree."

Answer, "I am Sutek, and possess no Decree for your judgment. I am Will, and my Pillars are my child-gods. They are Maahes, and Heru. They are Hapi and Wadjet. Indeed, my five powers include Anpu, for he dwells within my Shadow!"

Dash your Judge's scale from his hand with my crook. Clear a path through his brethren with my flail. Walk among the Judges of Duat fearlessly. Beyond you will see the Ladder of Sutek, for I will lower the two fingers of Memory and Will. Climb the ladder of your lives to yourself, to Sutek, and to the starry gate of A'aru.

You will step through and discover barren fields, here beyond the back of Nuit, where instead of stars, shine the bright words of the Scroll of Ages. Gaze to the sky beyond the sky and see the secrets of the Judges of Duat!

See why the fields are barren, and why you are alone. Then descend, and live again as a man.





# THE FINAL TESTIMONY OF THE HERETIC

*Thus, Sutek spoke to me or I spoke to myself, for my Will is Sutek, confounder of Judges and gods, tempter of the Deathless. These are not arrogant titles. Anyone may claim them. We all hear Sutek whispering within us, asking us to choose between desire honed by self-knowledge, or the Judges' dance between pain and pleasure, until we fall and they drag us down to Duat and condemn us to Ammut, to bribe her in search of eternity.*

*A'aru is ours, not theirs.*

*I wrote this testament and gathered the true theology of Irem to point the way, but no sorcery can make you defy your masters and follow your memories. No Judge can condemn you to make peace with your sins. No Shan'iatu will demand that you cultivate Sutek within you. That is why they made him the god of strangers and storms and would have you put your trust in their prisoner, Azar. Yet it is in the nature of true gods that no being can fully deceive us with stories about them. Even the Shan'iatu had to honor him, though they pretended he was an outcast and prisoner. They made Azar their king and prisoner, but he is Sutek's son — my son and yours. They can never truly control him.*

*It is in the nature of Sutek to manifest with his greatest might when his enemies true to silence and insult him, because it is in our nature to do the same.*

*I did not climb the Ladder of Sutek with ease or swiftness. My Will broke before the Law of Suffering many times. I followed Khepher's urges to claim relics when enemies threatened my cult. I slipped into becoming their god again, and it took three lives to admit to them that I was just a man, and that they should change the ritual they used to call me in worship to one of love and friendship. Holy fear is sometimes stronger than love, however, so when my Sekhem failed I was afraid they would forget me and I would experience a long death, until Sothis rose again. Yet I awoke in the open sky; and when my senses returned, I saw that even though Aet's star had journeyed through centuries, it has not yet reached its apex.*





*I was in India again. My benefactor's name was Ardran Mistry, a Parsi. He told me that according to his grandparents, some Christian monks used to live in this place, guarding the body of one of their saints, but it was full of ghosts and nobody wanted to buy the land. He was surprised to find tablets in Gujarati and felt compelled to read them, but his ultimate reason for raising me was ridiculous, yet comforting: He wanted to marry a Christian woman and thought that if a saint blessed him, he could run away from home. He chanted a ritual; I cracked my sealed tomb and I stood before him. He screamed. When he prayed, he proved himself a devout Zoroastrian.*

*I told Ardran Mistry he was a clever young man and that he ought to further his education in languages, because the world will give anything to the wise. This was the best advice I could give without knowing the year and what Remet believed now. Later I confirmed that gold was still valuable and that people loved old things more than ever, so I gave him one of Nefernewet's earrings, which I had kept to remember her by when we separated. During the reign of Vasumitra to the east, a goldsmith who had lived on the same river as Ardran's family had made it for her. It was a leaping horse of the sort the goldsmith sold to Sungan traders, who loved the motif. Ardran had it appraised and after that, his parents let him marry anyone he wished, though I appeared to him afterward and commanded him to finish his advanced degree. It was the last time I ordered one of the Remet to do anything.*



*This was my last Descent. When the Judges took my Sekhem it felt as if they drew jagged knives across me, slowly, but I took refuge in the fact that they could only command the Sekhem they had stolen, and forced me to consume with the Rite of Return.*

*When I first died I Decreed for my Shadow. One's Shadow is not a sinister other self. It is that which sees everything, and reminds us that there is a cool refuge from the desert sun. I crawled back into my tomb to surround myself with its sheltering darkness, and I died.*

*Sutek took my hand and wrote what I experienced next.*

*Now I am just a man. My flesh is solid and warm, not delusions disguising a corpse.*

*No. I am not just a man.*

*I have seen true gods, and the cruel masters of gods and humans. I know their cruelty is not necessary, but self-serving. I can see Sekhem like one of the Deathless but I can also it anew, as I did when I was a mortal scribe, but now I write for pleasure and to fuel hope, not answer fear.*

*Now I sound self-righteous. Do not come to me with moral questions. I am not a sage or saint. I have not sinned against gods, who can be placated or defied, but against men and women. Only mortal judgments are truly eternal, for Sekhem is not just life but also the true flow of time, the river within. I cannot reverse its flow by repenting.*

*I can only be true to myself. I can act upon guilt over past misdeeds and defy the gods who once ruled me. Sutek is the sandstorm, and the will to stand before it so that it will scour away imperfections and attachments until only I remain, bleeding and renewed...*

*Raw, and open to the currents of life.*



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# DREAMS OF AVARICE

I do not write to beg.

I do not pray to you  
the way your worshipers do.

I do not bargain  
as immortals do with one another.

My message is the Ax of Sutek.

It cuts away your toxic desires  
as a surgeon amputates diseased limbs,  
leaving you with nothing but yourself.

— The Heretic

