



AHRIMAN – KEY OF INFINITY (2017)

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List of characters:

- * Ahzek Ahriman – Sorcerer of the Thousand Sons Legion;
- * Ignis – Companion of Ahriman;
- * Setekh – Necron.

(The prisoner breaking the shackles with a roaring effort)

The prisoner leapt off the slab¹. Its body slid through the molecules of the restraints and hit the energy dome. Sparks showered through the air as the field collapsed into a flat blast wave. The prisoner landed in a crouch. Its jailors loomed² above it towering in their armor. Behind them their crude automaton began to turn, light glinting³ off the silver and black of its carapace.

Ignis (commanding): “Kill protocol!”

The warrior in orange and black armor shouted. The automaton stepped forwards, piston driven limbs shaking the deck. The cannon on its shoulder swiveled⁴. The prisoner could feel the dark energy dancing in the weapon. It knew its shape and taste, old and familiar from wars that had scarred the stars when they were young. The gun weapon drew breath to fire. The prisoner’s senses traced the distances between every point in the room and sliced time down until only the decay of atoms marked its passing. The short distance from it to the automaton’s gun, from the automaton to its masters, from those masters to the door. Every measured value became like crystal, every facet⁵ and plane⁶ extending through countless dimensions.

The automaton fired. A beam of darkness sliced out. The air screamed. The beam struck the prisoner’s torso.

(the prisoner moaning)

The substance of its form began to unravel⁷, crumbling⁸ into nothingness as the beam bored⁹ through it. It was so quick. For other creatures it would have been an instant but for the prisoner it was a slow unfolding of obliteration. It had time to observe, to analyze, to know that the beam would pulse and the black energies would swallow its body in a flash of collapsing matter. It would not survive, but it did not need to survive. It just needed to reach the sphere which lay on a plinth behind its jailors. Its hand closed over the sphere.

(Chronometron launching its restarting sequence)

(prisoner laughing)

And the universe was made again in a flash of collapsing time.

(distant explosion)

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The prisoner became aware. Its senses reconnected to its consciousness one at a time. It could hear movement around it.

Ahriman (speaking indecipherably): “Now! show petter” ...

Ignis (speaking indecipherably): “Sub vanis...”

It heard the words and its mind began to break down the data they carried. Potential meanings rose and clustered¹⁰. It could see the root of meaning in the language, but it needed more to form understanding.

Ahriman (speaking indecipherably): "See shaun there".

Ignis (speaking indecipherably): "Cout vani... Crio pettion. No?"

Ahriman (speaking indecipherably): "Nev manos te shee. Shaun there? Cana ink. Can is sniver".

It was a simple language, but with some unusual symbolic systems grafted¹¹ into its structure. The voices of long dead civilizations echoed at the edge of the words.

Ignis (speaking indecipherably): "Function... ek it kell technology... Rauth... Belshan"

Ahriman (speaking indecipherably): "Si sharan... sir anten... and is cribed a rakus asson to tixis".

Ignis (speaking indecipherably): "Eee jus verash dianel".

Ahriman (speaking indecipherably): "Her feer to harat we kaut es toon".

Ignis (speaking indecipherably): "That enhet comfort".

With a little more analysis the prisoner could have traced the roots of the language back to its genesis. That could be useful in time, but for now it was irrelevant. The prisoner needed to escape and for that it needed one thing. It needed time.

Ahriman: "It is aware of us?"

Ignis: "Power is running through its structure".

Ahriman: "Is that a way of saying yes or of saying no?"

Ignis: "It is the only data I have available that relates to your question. I have no knowledge of this form of... life".

Ahriman: "Life? Hm, yes... I suppose we must call it that"

Visual input returned. Three figures stood before the prisoner. Two were of the bipedal typical norm in war machine armor. The third was a pure machine entity albeit a crude one, an automaton crafted of circuits and pistons. An energy lance with a fluted¹² barrel projected above its shoulders. The prisoner watched the trio as its sight stretched into the edges of the electromagnetic spectrum. It could not perceive the submolecular yet, but that would come. It needed time and the best way to gain that was to speak.

Setekh: "I can hear you. I can see you".

Ahriman: "You speak our language".

Setekh: "Its root and structure is... simple. Deriving¹³ its method and order expression is likewise... simple".

Ahriman: "What is your name?"

Setekh: "Name? Yes, a concept that your pseudo-knowledge system would value. The closest approximation that I can offer is Setekh, servant of eternity to the dynasties of the Hyksos".

Two figures glanced at each other.

Ignis: "It speaks like a human. There are emotional markers in the tonal structure. Arrogance¹⁴, defiance¹⁵, disdain¹⁶".

Ahriman: "No, it is not talking like a human. It is talking like us. It is imitating us, are you not, Setekh?"

Setekh: "You are a perceptive but limited being".

Ahriman: "Everything is a matter of perspective. From where I look at this moment we have much to gain from one another".

Setekh did not reply for a second. A section of its consciousness was preparing to realign¹⁷ the molecules of its body. When that was complete it would be able to phase through its bonds. From there... Well, that depended very much on where it was. Onboard a large ship in the vacuum... Yes, it was certain of that, but where was that ship? It shut down the line of thought. It would need to have answers but they would only be relevant once it was free. For that it needed to reach the Chronometron which lay on a stone plinth¹⁸ to the side of the slab. It would not have time to perform a significant time alteration, but it could reset events and make incremental¹⁹ changes for the next time it lived these moments. It calculated what it would need to do and the precise operation it would need to perform in the instant it touched the Chronometron. As the formulae crystallized in its mind it reflected that it might already have done these exact actions before.

Setekh: "What are your names? That is the convention²⁰ within your communication template, is it not?"

Ahriman: "My name is Ahzek Ahriman and my companion's name is Ignis".

Setekh: "I have never encountered your species before, but you are not typical specimens. When I was last conscious there were species that existed that might have developed into your genus²¹, but I would have expected both greater deviation from that physiology and less... amplification²² of gross physical qualities. Therefore you are not evolved creatures. You are creations, fusions of crude knowledge and biological stock. Is this line of reasoning correct?"

Ignis turned to Ahriman, the black lines of his bioelectric tattoos reformed into a different pattern.

Ignis: "Do you intend to question this... thing or does our method of analysis consist of letting it ask the questions? I do not intend this as humorous".

Ahriman did not respond, but held the gaze of Setekh. There was something about that stare. Setekh had not felt anything close to an emotion for aeons²³, but the cold intensity in those blue eyes...

Ahriman: "You infer²⁴ a great deal from very little, Setekh".

Setekh: "You are impressed by such small things. When you have aided in the building and destruction of civilizations greater than anything you can imagine, the wonder of the beasts which roam the ruins means nothing".

Ignis: "I infer that it means us".

Setekh: "My people shackled the stars and broke mortality when the species you sprang from had barely left the shrine pools it's spawned in. Our wars burned reality and the dominion of our kings is without limit. The ground you tread on is not yours. It is ours".

Ahriman: "The Necrontyr... The sleeping ones".

Setekh: "That name is not ours. Why give a name to totality?"

Ahriman: "Because whatever you were, you failed. Those that outlive ruin can call the wreckage of the past whatever they please".

Setekh (laughing): "We were and are and shall be. And I must thank you both, Ahriman and Ignis. This primitive exchange of meaningless emotional postures²⁵ has proved most instructive. I know you now, Ahzek Ahriman, and will remember you. But you will not remember this!"
(Setekh breaking the shackles and charging for the Chronometron)

(Ahriman crying out as if in surprise)

Setekh dissolved the shackles into dust and leapt for the Chronometron. Ignis and Ahriman began to move. They were fast, very fast, but they were unprepared and Setekh's hand was around the Chronometron and the calculations flowed across the contact and Ignis shouted and the world began to end again.

Ignis (commanding): "Kill it! Kill protocol!"

The beam of darkness stabbed out from the automaton's gun and struck Setekh in the torso.

(the prisoner moaning)

The Chronometron activated and the present became the past.

(Chronometron activating with a whirring noise)

* * *

Time peeled back around Setekh. It could not remember the previous instances of this moment but information existed in his awareness that could only be there if he had already passed through this time before. It knew the names of the three figures who stood above him. It knew the positioning of each object in the cell and most importantly it knew that this was the final loop through this instance. Its Chronometron had moved

positioning by increments through each of the previous iterations of this encounter. Each time it had reached the device before it was destroyed and each of those times it had been able to steal a sliver²⁶ more time for the next instance. With each of those changes it had increased its awareness and changed the setting of the Chronometron. It only needed to perform this one final operation and it would be able to collapse this loop of time. It would be free.

Ahriman: "It is aware?"

Ignis: "Yes, it is aware".

Setekh's thought flow faulted. Something was out of place in the pattern of events, something that it had not engineered. It did not have time to deduce what was wrong. Every slice of its consciousness was needed to prepare its body to phase through its shackles.

Ahriman: "You are Setekh, Cryptek of the dynasty of the Hyksos. Can you understand me?"

Setekh: "I can understand you. Your linguistic forms are as primitive as your methods of imprisonment".

Ahriman: "Do you know why you are here?"

Setekh paused. The question did not fit. Lines of deduction and inference²⁷ began to spawn in Setekh's mind. He shut them down. It was irrelevant and he needed his full consciousness preparing to interface with the Chronometron as he was almost ready. He just needed another sliver of time.

Setekh: "You wish information. You wish secrets".

Ahriman: "Yes, but your insight is limited".

Setekh: "And this exchange is irrelevant!"

The shackles dissolved as Setekh came off the slab. The skin of his frame flickered²⁸ from dull chrome to mirror black. The automaton began to move. Its cannon swiveled. The dark energies within built. Setekh's hand extended to the Chronometron.

(the prisoner laughing)

The beam of darkness snapped out, but it would never find its target. The Chronometron was beneath Setekh's hand. Its fingers closed on the device and froze. Frost climbed its digits²⁹. The air was shimmering³⁰. Setekh's awareness was bubbling³¹ with paradox. Light blurred to dark, mass and energy interchanging and vanishing out of existence. The beam of the automaton's gun was a frozen splinter of blackness hanging in midair. Ahriman and Ignis were still but light blazed around them, feathering into shadow, shifting between colors. Invisible bands of force coiled³² tighter around Setekh as it forced out words.

Setekh (trying to free itself): "You are slaves of the anathema realm".

Ahriman: “And now you see the totality of your position. To watch your actions has been most illuminating”.

Ahriman extended his hand and the Chronometron rose from the plinth and settled into his palm. He turned it between his fingers, head tilting³³ as the light played over the sphere’s surface. Ignis stepped closer beside him, tattoo patterns shifting across his blank face. Ahriman opened his hand and the Chronometron floated up into the air and then dropped into Ignis’s grasp.

Ignis: “Incredible. The effect on the flow of time is seamless³⁴, not even a ripple³⁵ in the warp. The events are simply reset and flow again”.

Ahriman: “And this from a bore ball carried by one of their techno viziers. Does this answer you doubts about the reality of such technology?”

Ignis: “It is persuasive but by what means does it function?”

Setekh’s eyes buzzed with static as Ahriman leaned in towards him. The green lenses of the sorcerer’s helm blazed point.

Ahriman: “Ah... That, my brother, is the heart of the question”.