

Moses

Against the Gods of Egypt

Chronicles of the Watchers

Book 3

By Brian Godawa

Moses: Against the Gods of Egypt
Chronicles of the Watchers, Book 3
2nd Edition 2.2

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NOTE TO THE READER

Moses: Against the Gods of Egypt is a standalone novel. But it is also part of the *Chronicles of the Watchers* series whose books all share what biblical scholar Michael S. Heiser has called “the Deuteronomy 32 worldview”¹ and what I call “the Watcher paradigm.”

Rather than try to re-explain this worldview *within* the story of each novel, I will lay it out here in brief summary. For more detailed biblical support and explanation, I recommend reading my booklet, *Psalm 82: The Divine Council of the Gods, the Judgment of the Watchers, and the Inheritance of the Nations* ([affiliate link](#)). It is the foundation of all three of my novel series: *Chronicles of the Nephilim*, *Chronicles of the Watchers*, and *Chronicles of the Apocalypse*.

Deuteronomy 32 is well-known as the Song of Moses. In it, Moses sings of Israel’s story and how she had come to be God’s chosen nation. He begins by glorifying God and then telling them to “remember the days of old”:

*When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.
But the Lord’s portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.
(Deuteronomy 32:8–9)*

The context of this passage is the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11 when mankind was divided. Rebellious humanity sought divinity in unified rebellion, so God separated them by confusing their tongues, which divided them into the seventy (Gentile) nations described in Genesis 10 with their

¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 113–114.

ownership of those bordered lands as the allotted “inheritance” of those peoples.

But inheritance works in heaven as it does on earth. The people of Jacob (Israel) would become Yahweh’s allotted inheritance while the other Gentile nations were the allotted inheritance of the *Sons of God*.

So who were these Sons of God who ruled over the Gentile nations (Psalm 82:1-8)? Some believe they were human rulers. Others argue for their identities as supernatural principalities and powers. I am in the second camp. In my *Psalm 82* booklet, I prove why they cannot be humans and must be heavenly creatures.

The phrase “Sons of God” is a technical term that means divine beings from God’s heavenly court (Job 1:6; 38:7), and they possess many different titles. They are sometimes called “heavenly host” (Isaiah 24:21-22; Deuteronomy 4:19 with Deuteronomy 32:8-9; 1 Kings 22:19-23), “holy ones” (Deuteronomy 33:2-3; Psalm 89:5-7; Hebrews 2:2), “the divine council” (Psalm 82:1; 89:5-7), “Watchers” (Daniel 4:13, 17, 23), and “gods” or *elohim* in Hebrew (Deuteronomy 32: 17, 43; Psalm 82:1; 58:1-2). Yes, you read that last one correctly. God’s Word calls these beings *gods*.

But fear not. That isn’t polytheism. The word “god” in this biblical sense is a synonym for “heavenly being” or “divine being” whose realm is that of the spiritual.² “*Elohim/gods*” does not necessarily mean uncreated beings that are all-powerful and all-knowing. Yahweh alone is that God. Yahweh is the God of gods (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:2). He created the other *elohim* (“gods”). These “gods” are created angelic beings who are most precisely referred to as Sons of God.

The biblical narrative is as follows. The Fall in the Garden was not the only source of evil in the world. Before the Flood, some of these heavenly Sons of God rebelled against Yahweh and left their divine dwelling to come to earth (Jude 6), where they violated Yahweh’s holy separation and mated with human women (Genesis 6:1-4). This was not a racial separation but a spiritual one. Their corrupt hybrid seed were called *Nephilim* (giants), and their effect on humanity included such corruption and violence on the earth

² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 23-27.

that Yahweh sent the Flood to wipe everyone out and start over again with Noah and his family (Genesis 6:11-13; 2 Peter 2:4-6).

Unfortunately, after the Flood humanity once again united in evil while building the Tower of Babel, a symbol of idolatrous worship of false gods. So Yahweh confused their tongues and divided them into the seventy nations. Since mankind would not stop worshipping false gods, the living God gave them over to their lusts (Romans 1:24, 26, 28) and placed them under the authority of the fallen Sons of God that they worshipped. Fallen spiritual rulers for fallen humanity (Psalm 82:1-7; 58:1-2). It's as if God said to humanity, "Okay, if you refuse to stop worshipping false gods, then I will give you over to them and see how you like them ruling over you."

Deuteronomy 32 hints at a spiritual reality behind the false gods of the nations, calling them "demons" (Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37-38). The apostle Paul later ascribes demonic reality to pagan gods as well (1 Corinthians 10:20; 8:4-6). The New Testament continues this ancient notion of spiritual principalities and powers influencing earthly powers "behind the scenes," so to speak (Ephesians 6:12; 3:10). The two were inextricably linked in historic events. As Jesus indicated, whatever happened in heaven also happened on earth (Matthew 6:10). Earthly kingdoms in conflict are intimately connected to heavenly powers in conflict (Daniel 10:12-13, 20-21; 2 Kings 6:17; Judges 5:19-20).

So the Bible says that there is demonic reality to false gods. Just what this looks like is not exactly described in the text of Scripture. But since those Sons of God who were territorial authorities over the nations were spiritually fallen Watchers, that makes them demonic or evil in essence.

So what if they were the actual spiritual beings behind the false gods of the ancient world? What if the fallen Sons of God were masquerading as the gods of the nations to keep humanity enslaved in idolatry to their authority? That would affirm the biblical stories of earthly events occurring in synchronization with heavenly events. It would not have to be a one-to-one correspondence of Watcher with pagan god. Evil angels could put on the disguises of different gods at will to achieve their deceptive purposes.

Psalm 82:8 hints at the final judgment of these fallen gods when it links their disinheritance of the nations to Yahweh "arising" and taking possession of the nations back from them. Through the "arising" of resurrection, the

Messiah would literally assume their territorial rights and power as his own. The messianic connection is explained in more detail in my booklet *Psalm 82*.

That is the biblical premise of the *Chronicles of the Watchers*. The pagan gods like Ra, Horus, Set, Isis, and others are actually fallen Sons of God, Watchers of the nations, crafting identities and narratives as gods of those nations. The ultimate end of these spiritual rebels is depicted in the series *Chronicles of the Apocalypse*. But for now they plan, conspire, and fight to keep their allotted peoples and lands, all while seeking to stop God's messianic goal of inheriting all the nations (Psalm 2:1-9; 82:8) through his seed (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:16).

My goal is to use the fantasy genre to show the theological reality of spiritual warfare while remaining faithful to the biblical text.

One other word for those who share my high view of Scripture. In the interest of focusing on the story of Moses, I not only drew from the Bible but from Jewish Second Temple literature as well as Egyptian sources. The purpose of this was not to "add" to Scripture through syncretism, but rather to subvert pagan narratives and fill in the gaps between Scripture in a way that is faithful to Scripture.

The reader will notice that there are some strange or shocking differences between this novel and what they are familiar with in their understanding of Moses and his life. Moses is one of the most beloved of Bible heroes. But many of us have preconceptions based on the classic 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments*, starring Charlton Heston as Moses. Fans of that movie will no doubt notice significant differences in this novel. Seti is not the Pharaoh of Moses's youth, and Ramesses is not the Pharaoh of the exodus. And Moses is not like Charlton Heston's superhero portrayal. In this novel, he is much more human and sinful. Rest assured, this author believes the Bible is God's Word, and all proposed interpretations in this novel are based on intense biblical and historical research.

So if you are interested in learning more about the historical, biblical, and religious foundation of this novel and those differences with previous depictions of Moses, I have written a companion booklet explaining the research I've done and the choices I've made. It's called *The Spiritual World*

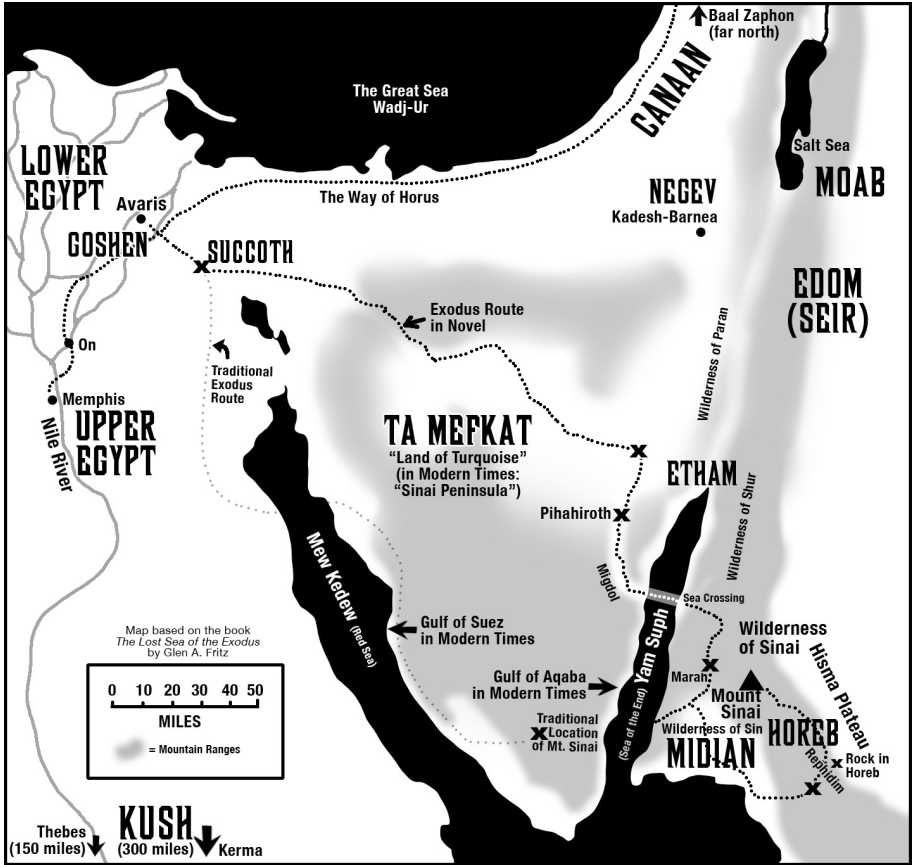
of Moses and Egypt: Biblical Background to the Novel Moses: Against the Gods of Egypt.

Thank you for your understanding of imagination and faith.

Brian Godawa

Author, *Chronicles of the Watchers*

MAP



PRONUNCIATION KEY

Foreign Name/Word	English Pronunciation
Amun	Ah-moon
Avaris	Uh-var-iss
Ba, Ka	Bah, Kah
Ba'al	Bale or Bah-awl
Djedneferre Dudimose	Jed-Neffe-uh Dood-ih-mōse
Heka	Heck-uh
Ipuwer	Ip-you-ware
Isis	Eye-sis
Khonsuemwaset	Con-sue-em-wah-set
Khonsu	Con-sue
Ma'at	Mah-ott
Nun	Noon
Nut	Noot
Osiris	Oh-sigh-riss
Ptah	Pe-tah
Ra	Rah
Sobekmose	Sō-beck-mōse
Ta Mefkat	Tah Meff-cot
Thoth	Tawth
Tjarbit	Char-beet
Yam Suph	Yahm Soof

“On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am Yahweh.”
Exodus 12:12

CHAPTER 1

The Red Sea

Horus the Great God, Lord of Heaven, faced his nemesis-in-arms on a mountainous ridge near *Mew Kedew* of *Kemet*, the Red Sea of Egypt. Horus had contended for a long time with his uncle Set, lord of chaos and storm, over kingship of the Two Lands. Eighty years of such contention—at least that was how the myth presented it. Set had reigned in the land of upper Egypt in the south highlands and sought to rule over Horus’s land of lower Egypt in the north. They tried to settle their dispute like champions.

They assumed their hybrid forms as seven-foot-tall human bodies with zoomorphic heads—Horus with that of a falcon and Set with that of a long-snouted canine creature. Both were bare-chested, wearing light leather battle skirts.

Set swung a gigantic mace that only he, with his massive physique, could lift. Horus dodged and parried with his javelin, drawing blood on Set’s arm, enraging him. As immortal Watchers, they could not die, but as created beings, they could suffer the weapons of their warfare.

Horus shouted in fury, “You murdered my father, you sought to murder me, and now you want kingship over all of Egypt?”

Horus thrust his javelin. Set swatted it away.

“You should be thanking me,” crowed Set. “Osiris now rules Duat, the underworld, as God of the Dead. If it had not been for me, he would still be stuck married to my nagging witch sister.”

Set’s words seemed to empower the swing of his mighty mace. Horus sidestepped it, but the weapon’s metallic head hit the ground with such force that the earthquake threw Horus off his feet and onto his back.

And Set was upon him.

The story went that Osiris was king of all Egypt and had married Isis, his sister, the goddess of magic. Their brother Set was envious of Osiris’s

kingship, so he tricked the king and murdered him. Before Isis could recover the body, Set cut the corpse into pieces, sending them to each of the fourteen *nomes*, or provinces, of Egypt. One for each ruler. Isis tracked down all the pieces and reassembled Osiris to resurrect him. The only piece she could not find was his male member, which she recreated with magic. Before Osiris returned to Duat to rule the dead, husband and wife slept together one last time, and Isis gave birth to Horus, the new heir to the throne.

When Set could not find the infant to kill him, he devoted his life to unending chaos to keep the child Horus from taking his rightful throne. At least that's how the Egyptian narrative went. Reality was another story, as told in Enoch's primordial Book of the Watchers.

But now the vengeful Set had Horus on the ground, pinned beneath his mighty strength.

Horus struggled to free his arms. "Let the gods decide."

"Now you appeal to the assembly," complained Set, "when you are losing."

One of Horus's arms was held down by Set's hand. The other was pinned beneath Set's leg.

The canine god snarled maliciously. "If you cannot see things my way, then maybe you should not see anything at all." Set reached down and dug into Horus's right eye.

The warrior screamed in pain as Set gouged out his eye, plucking it from its socket.

He held it aloft in victory, showing it to all the land around them. "Get one last good look at everything you will lose."

But Set's victory was cut short. The sharp edge of Horus's dagger slipped from beneath his opponent's pinning leg and sliced off Set's private parts. Set rolled off Horus with a high-pitched moan, clutching his groin in agony.

No, the gods could not die. But oh, they could suffer pain.

Horus stumbled to his feet, stood victoriously over his wounded rival, and spoke through his own pain. "I think it is time to let the assembly of the gods decide."

• • • • •

“Right rules might! Give the office to Horus! He is the rightful heir!” The argument came from Shu, god of the air. He stood before the gods assembled in court at the temple of Ra in the city of On. Though they currently operated in the unseen spirit realm, the gods used the earthly sacred spaces built by their human subjects whose worship spiritually empowered the deities. Irony since the deities were supposed to be transcendent of their puny earthlings.

The Ennead—the company of ruling gods—had gathered to resolve this most important of decisions—a question whose answer was also reflected in the earthly realm of authority because heaven and earth were linked: Who would rule the united lands of Upper and Lower Egypt, Horus or Set? So too, the human kings of south and north sought to unify their earthly kingdoms, the Red Land of the desert with the Black Land of the fertile Nile. As above, so below.

Though the Ennead was normally nine in number, others of significance were present as well. All of them manifested their humanoid presence as the covenanted Watchers of Egypt in this divine council of the gods. Ra, a solar deity and king of the gods, presided over the court. Thoth, the scribal god of wisdom and secret knowledge, helped facilitate and record the proceedings.

Isis and Thoth already agreed with Shu that Horus, ruler of the Black Land of the northern delta, should be king of the south as well. No one spoke up for the red-headed Set, ruler of the Red Land of southern desert, so he spoke for himself. “Mighty Ra-Horakhty, the All-Lord, who wears the Red Crown and White Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, and all the members of this council of shining ones, I am the strongest in this pantheon,” Set paused with confidence, “and you know it.”

Set turned back to Ra and added with a bow, “With the exception, of course, of your glory. But without me guarding the prow of your solar boat every night, you would not get past the sea serpent Apophis to rise every morning.”

That claim was met with silent affirmation. They could not mock the mythology they had crafted for the Egyptians. It was a covenant by which they were bound.

Horus, now wearing an eye patch, guffawed. “You are a brute of strength. I will give you that. But you are also monumentally stupid. I have bested you

in all our contests over the years simply through strategy and intelligence. I present my latest evidence of said superiority.” Horus raised his trophy of Set’s organ taken from their most recent skirmish.

A rumble of laughter rolled through the assembly.

“I disagree,” replied Set, raising Horus’s gouged eye in the air, “I am not sure that you are seeing things clearly enough.” The audience response was not quite as enthusiastic. So Set continued, “As for our contests, before you took from me my manhood, I recall the pleasure of taking yours.”

Now the assembly responded with a unanimous gasp of empathy for the violated Horus. The Great God would never forget that horrible experience of rape at the hands of his scheming uncle.

“Enough!” the voice of Ra boomed through the assembly, silencing everyone with his authority. “I have received word from Osiris.” He opened the letter from the Lord of the Dead, still abiding in his underworld realm of Duat.

He read the words with deliberation. “Thus saith Osiris, Bull who dwells in On, Son of Ptah. I give my testimony to the Ennead from my dwelling in the West where Duat resides. Horus is my son and therefore benefactor of my throne on earth. There should be no contention. Set killed me, and Ra brought me back to life to be Lord of the Dead. If you defraud Horus, my rightful heir, for the benefit of my brother and murderer Set, I will unleash the horrors of the underworld upon the land of the living. Do what is right. Grant Horus my son the double crown.”

The words rang through the hall with fierce solemnity. They had spent millennia building their pantheon of gods, enslaving the Egyptian lands beneath their hands. But internecine squabbles like this threatened their unity. If Osiris made good on his promise of underworld invasion, they could lose their power and become prey to the gods of other nations around them: Kush in the south, Assyria in the north, Babylon in the east.

But Set himself was an unpredictable agent of chaos that also threatened Ma’at, the established order of the cosmos. Placing that agent in control of it all would be more foolish than allowing him to roam free with his disrupting behavior. Set’s claim to the throne was empty, and everyone knew it. He was a murderer and a liar and would be banished to the desert where chaos ruled.

Thus, the contendings of Horus and Set were resolved by the assembly unanimously awarding Horus the white crown of Upper Egypt to be worn with his red crown of Lower Egypt, embodying the unity of the Red and Black Lands. The white crown was a bulbous tall pin shape that fit within the wide circular red crown that graced the Great God's head.

Ma'at had been restored. The proper order of the cosmos maintained as Horus was again united with the earthly king of all Egypt, north and south. On earth as it is in heaven.

Thoth, the scribal deity, strode up to Set, held out his hand, and commanded, "The eye of Horus."

Set winced in pain. "Only if he gives me back what is mine."

Thoth replied, "Only if Horus wills it."

Set looked around at the eyes of all upon him, enforcing the will of Horus. He might be the strongest of them all, but he could not stand against them all. He reluctantly reached into his pouch and handed the eye of Horus to Thoth, who walked over to the hawk-headed deity. The humiliation burned Set's soul with the fires of revenge. He was already scheming a new plan.

Thoth reached Horus and gave him the stolen eye. Horus put it back into its socket. Thoth, also a god of healing, spit upon Horus's replaced eye and gave the Great God back his sight. Horus now gleamed with a golden shine as his power and authority returned. He stood to address the assembly, rising to his full height of eight feet.

"Shining ones, Watchers of the Red and Black Lands, listen to me now. Though we have unity, we do not have the security we need for expanding of our pantheon. For as I speak, our perpetual enemy to the south, the land of Kush, still jeopardizes Egypt's dominance. They are led by the rebel god Amun and his allies, Satet, Anuket, and Tawaret."

Those were the names of various deities over the Kushites, a people of dark skin, who thrived several hundred miles south of Egypt down the Nile. Kush was part of a larger area called Nubia that contained similar tribes. Kushites were a distant people but a powerful one that had cost the kings of Egypt many years and many lives in the pursuit of subjugation.

Horus the golden continued, "We must be united to defeat our foes in the south before we can set our eyes on the northern enemy."

He turned to look at Set. “And that is why I will extend the hand of grace to Set, remove his banishment, and return to him what I have taken if he but bends the knee in submission to my rule.”

He stared at Set, waiting his response. The entire assembly went deathly quiet. This could turn the tides of war. But Set was an incorrigible self-centered monstrosity. Horus’s first act was to gamble his newly gained authority on an offer that would surely be rejected and make him look weak before the assembly. It was as if Set had been given the advantage after all. That the power was in his hands.

But Set knelt to one knee and bowed his head in deference to Horus. He announced, “I pledge my allegiance to the Great God, the Lord of Heaven.”

The entire assembly erupted in applause. It was the first moment of unity and hope in a long time for this bickering body of divinities. The feeling of victory was palpable.

And yet Horus watched his kneeling, defeated opponent with a skeptical eye. Set was a murderer, a liar, and a rebel, the very soul of chaos. Though Horus was obligated to accept outward obeisance, he knew that Set was not to be trusted.

CHAPTER 2

Kush

Egyptian overseer General Sobekmose led his army of six thousand soldiers up to the mouth of the Uraeus Valley north of the Kushite capital city of Kerma. It was just before dusk with the sun approaching the horizon. Sobekmose was six feet tall with a muscular frame and skill from years of military training. He wore a *nemes*, the striped cloth headdress that represented the authority of the king, over his tightly cropped dark-brown hair. It could not hide his large bushy eyebrows that gave accent to his unusually bright light-brown eyes.

As eldest son of King Sobekhotep IV of Egypt, Sobekmose represented the sovereign as his general and successor. He was almost forty years old. But as *adopted* son of that ruler, Sobekmose always felt the need to prove himself above and beyond what his station required. So when the Egyptian king called upon Sobekmose to push back the invading forces of Kush, the general did not stop pushing until he reached the Kushite capital city of Kerma three hundred miles south of Upper Egypt.

Sobekmose was both relentless and ruthless toward his enemies. He had first recaptured the old Egyptian capital city of Memphis from the Kushite invaders, enslaving the captives for building projects. He then took back the new urban center of Thebes along with its magnificent temple of Karnak that had been desecrated by the abominable foreigners. But the further Sobekmose went south upriver, further away from the Nile delta, the more he would execute captives rather than enslave them.

After returning the cities and forts along the river back into Egyptian hands, the general kept marching into Kushite territory on his way to Kerma with intentions of retribution. He knew the Kushite king would be expecting him but not from this direction and not this soon. The typical pathway of

approach to Kerma was to follow the Nile shoreline and then to cross the water to attack the city on the east bank. But this route was circuitous along the snaking river, taking a week or more, and a riverside attack was perilous for the Egyptian forces.

So Sobekmose took a short cut by crossing the Nile up north at the third cataract where the waters were rough with rocks and boulders. He then came directly south, avoiding the river, and was about to travel through the Uraeus Valley, which led directly to Kerma's north city walls. He would arrive at the capital days before the Kushites anticipated him, thus surprising them. And he would also avoid the disadvantage of attacking from the riverside of the fortress.

But there was a dangerous complication to this strategic surprise route. The valley through which they were about to pass was infested with the winged fiery serpent called the uraeus, which could decimate an army with their venomous bites. It was the reason why the Kushites would never expect their attackers to come this way, a natural threat promising mass casualties into which no informed leader would deliberately march their men.

But Sobekmose was more than informed. He was also prepared. He stood in his chariot looking into the valley before them. His lieutenant and loyal bodyguard Khanethothes rode a chariot beside the general and eyed him for a command. He was the general's physical and mental equal though in some ways his opposite. Khanethothes was bald with white eyebrows and lashes, light-blue eyes, and whitish skin. He was an albino Nubian who had an otherworldly hybrid presence.

Sobekmose gestured, and the trumpeters called forward a special regiment. A hundred wagons carrying large baskets made from papyrus reeds came wheeling to the front of the army. Another command and the baskets were opened.

A flurry of thousands of birds burst out of their baskets and into the valley like a storm cloud. They were ibises, large birds, mostly light-feathered, with hearty bodies, long curved necks, and even longer beaks. Ibises were sacred for their connection to Thoth, the scribal god of wisdom.

And they were snake killers.

Sobekmose smirked at Khanethothes as they watched the flurry of birds descend upon the valley like a regiment of avian mercenaries, hunting and

killing a multitude of serpents hidden from the setting sun in the rocks and crevices.

Some of the flying serpents burst out of their hiding places to fight back, their leathery wings allowing them the ability to glide for short distances. They were normally a frightening sight to human victims. But they didn't have the strength or agility of their feathered adversaries, who were swooping and soaring from superior positions. The sounds of ibises screeching echoed against the valley walls like attacking war cries. The soldiers cheered behind Sobekmose.

Khanethothes leaned toward his general with a return grin. "It appears that your tactic worked, General. The soldiers think you are Thoth incarnate. You should have no trouble getting them to storm the impossible fortress of our enemy."

The lieutenant was being a bit ironic. The general was concerned about the Kushites' mighty defenses. Military forces could not fully surround their walled city because of its location on the shore of the Nile, and those walls were tall and deep.

It had taken almost a year for Sobekmose to recapture Upper Egypt. But now they were in the enemy's territory far from home and reinforcements. And it was going to be a long siege.

The standard bearers were the first to step into the cleared valley. They carried the military banners of the king, images of golden winged uraeus serpents on poles just like the serpents that had been killed in this valley. The uraeus was a symbol of the king's own power, thus their presence on many of the headdresses and crowns worn by royalty. But Egyptians believed that the standards were not merely symbols. They were actual repositories of the king's divine power. The attacking soldiers hoped that the divine power of the king contained in his standards would repel any surviving serpents.

As Sobekmose led his army through the cleared Uraeus Valley, his only thought was to pray to the gods that this surprise attack might gain him the upper hand he needed to achieve a most difficult conquest.

His prayers were answered when an Egyptian scout met them just before reaching the end of the valley at dusk. He brought information that the Kushite army, about four thousand strong, was encamped just outside the walls of

Kerma a mere half-mile from the invading forces. And they had no clue what was coming for them.

Sobekmose mused over the relative parity of battle skills between his people and his enemies. Egyptian and Kushite soldiers were similarly dressed and equipped for war. Both wore battle skirts, the Egyptians of white linen with a loin cloth covering, the Kushites of animal skins like panthers or lions. Both tended to be bare-chested with sandals or bare feet, and both used similar weapons of arrows, spears, and swords. Both carried animal skin-covered shields, but the Egyptian version was tall and square with a rounded top while the Kushite version was smaller and round.

Though the Egyptians outnumbered the Kushite forces and had the element of a surprise night attack, his enemies had one advantage in that scenario. They were ebony-skinned, rendering them difficult to see in the dark of evening.

So Sobekmose prayed to Thoth, the moon god of Egypt, to grant them the light to see their enemy as the ibises had seen the serpents in the hidden crevices of the Uraeus Valley. And he planned the attack for the hour just before dawn so that by the time fighting was engaged, the light of day would be their ally.

Sobekmose and Khanethoths led the Egyptian chariots out of the valley and onto the field where the Kushites were quartered. The cloud of dust churned up around them, making Sobekmose think of Set, the storm god, riding on clouds of judgment. Lightning was in his hands and thunder on his lips as his chariot forces crashed into the unsuspecting camp of enemy soldiers in tents.

Most of the Kushites were at ease, sleeping or cleaning up from their dinner meal. They were brutal warriors, but few were able to gather their weapons in time to fight Egypt's mighty swift sword that came down upon their heads.

Chariots first crashed through the camp, trampling everything beneath their war hooves and wooden wheels until chaos led to panic. The Egyptian infantry followed, cutting down the unprepared Kushites trying to muster a fighting force.

Blood ran through the streets as high as a horse's bridle that night. The Kushite army was slaughtered without mercy as the stars fell from the sky and

the moon turned to blood. Such was the symbolic language of military destruction. It was swift justice in Sobekmose's mind.

But not swift enough.

About a quarter of the Kushite soldiers had escaped behind the walls of the city and were able to shut the gates before the Egyptians could catch them. Sobekmose led a battery of a hundred Egyptians up to the gates with logs to batter their way in before the Kushites could reinforce the gateway.

The morning sun was rising in the sky at the Egyptians' backs. Ra's rays blinded the eyes of the Kushites facing them. Sobekmose jumped off his chariot in complete disregard for his own safety and engaged in hand-to-hand combat with two Kushite warriors left outside the gates.

He used his *khopesh* sickle sword to hack one warrior to the ground. But when the other tripped over his fallen comrade, Sobekmose allowed him the dignity to stand back up before returning to battle with him. He didn't do so for the sake of fairness. The point, after all, was to win the battle and kill the enemy. But he had a deep-seated sense of pride that wanted all his achievements to be won by superior skill, not from mere luck or favor.

He cut down his opponent with his superior skill.

The Egyptian soldiers began pounding away at the gate's creaking timber with several battering rams, thirty men to a log. But in their haste, they failed to concern themselves with what was going on over their heads. Large cauldrons of boiling pitch came pouring down, scalding many to death. As the survivors sought to rescue their fellow burned, a fiery arrow hit the oily black liquid and caused a firestorm to consume everyone in its fury.

Virtually all the Egyptian warriors involved in the gate offensive perished in the conflagration. Sobekmose tried to drag one of his wounded soldiers to safety, but the heat was unbearable, so he watched in horror, hearing his own men screaming in pain as they were burned alive in the flames.

That moment of dread pause allowed an archer on the precipice to take aim with his bow right at the back of Sobekmose. But the Kushite arrow went askew when an enemy dart hit the archer in the sternum—a dart launched by the bow of Khanethothes, who was guarding his lord and overseer. Sobekmose thanked him with a gesture of his fist over his heart and jumped back onto his chariot. The two rode back to their camp, leaving the Kushites safely behind their impenetrable walls.

Sobekmose and Khanethothes rode their chariots up to a ledge overlooking Kerma with a good vantage point about a hundred yards out. The morning sun illuminated the massacre below.

Sobekmose stared at the main tower. In that rising light, he could see a Kushite woman guarded by warriors standing at the top of the rampart and looking his way. She was dressed in what appeared to be royal garb with gems and golden jewelry sparkling in the sunlight. She stood with a regal posture that betrayed a high status, maybe that of a princess. She turned away quickly and was escorted back into the dark tower.

Khanethothes said, “I saw her watching you at the gates. I trust we sufficiently inspired her with fear.”

Sobekmose responded with a shrug. “More importantly, the king.”

They returned to their stronghold. Sobekmose did not look forward to the long siege that was sure to follow.

CHAPTER 3

Ra's solar boat began its rising journey across the morning sky. Sobekmose marched his way through camp back to his vast war tent for an appointment he had with the scribe Ipuwer. It had been a week since the siege began. The Egyptians had built their fortified camp on top of the Kushite encampment just out of range of the city walls. They stuck war shields in the ground around the perimeter and placed the general's large tent in the middle of the soldiers' tents. They had sentries keeping watch around the fence of shields to alert the Egyptian forces of any Kushite raids. But there were no raids forthcoming. The Kushites had lost too many of their forces, so they were hunkering down inside for the long haul.

So be it, thought Sobekmose. It would give him time for his messengers to communicate to the Egyptian king of their need for extra supplies and fresh soldiers.

The capture of Kerma would be a significant victory for Egypt. Kush had been a source of much needed trade goods. Ebony, ivory, incense, ostrich eggs, and other exotic commodities were treasured by Egyptians, whose exchange goods of honey, oil, ointments, and woven garments were desired by Kushites. But this southern nation also had an abundance of highly valuable raw materials such as gold, copper, precious stones, and most of all, a large slave workforce for mining those rare earth resources. If King Sobekhotep gained control over this land, he would enrich his kingdom beyond mere trade and increase his own workforce for dynastic expansion.

Sobekmose entered his tent, a large multi-room residence for the royal overseer of the northern army. He had a bedroom, a war room, and another reading compartment for his scrolls that he liked to bring with him. As a royal son, he was trained in all the arts of ruling, including scribal wisdom and multiple languages. He had a love for scrolls. He was fascinated by the learning of the kingdoms of the earth. The laws of Hammurabi of Babylon. The war strategy of Sargon the Great in Akkad. The ancient literature of his

own precious Egypt, center of the earth and oldest and wisest of all civilizations.

He made his way to the scroll room where the slender Ipuwer awaited dressed in royal garments that reflected the scribal god Thoth's own dress. A knee-length pleated kilt was wrapped around his waist. His torso was bare except for the wide necklace of turquoise and precious metals that draped his shoulders and upper chest. On his bald head he wore a plain *nemes* headdress, a sign of royal stewardship. The striped version of the headdress was reserved for the king.

"My lord overseer," Ipuwer said. "May we take a seat and begin?"

Sobekmose nodded, and they sat down on wooden stools facing each other.

Ipuwer led. "I am General Sobekmose, crown prince and son of Khaneferre Sobekhotep the Fourth of Egypt's thirteenth dynasty."

Sobekmose repeated the words, "I am General Sobekmose, c-crown prince and son of K-k-khaneferre Sobekhotep the F-f-f-fourth of Egypt's t-t-thirteenth dynasty."

"Very good," said Ipuwer. "Now watch my lips and let us say it together."

Sobekmose focused, trying to concentrate on the smooth pronunciation as he imitated his tutor. "I am General Sobekmose, c-crown prince and son of K-k-haneferre Sobekhotep the Fourth of Egypt's t-thirteenth dynasty."

"Better," said Ipuwer. "Now let us go through our exercises."

Ipuwer was a patient and supportive tutor. Sobekmose had been cursed with a stuttering problem since he was young. It haunted him through the years like an evil spirit. It had gotten better over time, but it seemed he would never fully eliminate it. It was the worst affliction to have as Egypt's crown prince. How could the people believe in the authority of a ruler who spoke with such hesitancy? Rulers needed to be strong and sure. Stuttering was weakness. It was one of the reasons why Sobekmose had striven to excel in both intellectual education and physical prowess. And why he had become a man of few words and a man of action instead.

His military strategy and fighting skills were superior to that of his brother Khahotepre, whose mental capacity was on the level of a baboon as far as the general was concerned. But despite Sobekmose's distinguished traits and status, his origin made his inheritance precarious. Technically, he was

firstborn by legal treaty, not by birth. He'd been born in the delta forty years ago after the early death of his birth father to Princess Meryt of Lower Egypt.

In those days, the two kings reigning over Upper and Lower Egypt stressed the nation's unity. Meryt's father, Palmanothes, was king of Lower Egypt in the north, considered "lower" because of its sea level elevation. Sobekhotep IV was the stronger king of Upper Egypt in the southern higher elevation. In the interest of unifying north and south under Sobekhotep, a marriage treaty uniting the young royal widow with Sobekhotep sealed the breach.

One of the covenant's conditions was that the king adopt her son and only living male heir and give the new crown prince the name Sobekmose. He would be removed from royal succession only if Palmanothes's daughter bore Sobekhotep a son, thereby joining in one throne the bloodlines of Upper and Lower Egypt .

All of which did not please Sobekhotep's chief wife at the time, who had just birthed Sobekhotep's own firstborn son Khahotepre. That Sobekhotep had chosen sovereignty over a united, powerful Egypt over securing his own bloodline on the throne rankled both his first wife and his son Khahotepre as he grew into adulthood. Especially when Meryt bore no children to her new husband and king, leaving Sobekmose as heir to the throne.

But if Sobekmose inherited the throne in his current condition, it could plunge the kingdom into chaos. For the king was a god, Horus incarnate on earth. And gods do not stutter. Such a situation could cause a revolution against the Ma'at of Egyptian civilization, its structured peace and orderliness. If the king was manifestly a weak mortal, then eventually the people would believe that they could rule their own lives with every man his own king. And that would truly be chaos, a symbolic return to the formlessness and void of the primeval waters. Sobekmose had to overcome this impediment.

"Think of each word by itself," instructed Ipuwer, "and say it slowly."

It was the last exercise of the day. They now sat before a table where Sobekmose was reading hieroglyphs, the Egyptians' writing system. They were helpful because they were images that typically represented sounds.

Sobekmose read carefully the official titulary of his father: "Khaneferre - Sobekhotep - the - Fourth, - the - living - Horus, - the - Son - of - Ra, - Lord - of - the - Two - Lands - K-k-k-k..." He stopped, his jaw tightened, jutted

outward. He howled with pent-up anger, grabbed the table and scroll, and threw them into the shelf of scrolls with a crash.

“Calm, my lord.” The scribe was the only one who was allowed to speak frankly to the prince—but only in private. Sobekmose had spent untold hours with him learning languages, writing, and speaking. Ipuwer had earned the prince’s trust.

“I cannot command respect if I cannot get through a sentence without stammering!” Sobekmose burst out in anger.

“You just did,” said Ipuwer.

Sobekmose paused, off-guard. The scribe was right.

“Because in your anger you were not thinking about your words.”

He was right again. The prince had to take his thoughts off himself.

Ipuwer said, “Unfortunately, intemperance will not command respect either.”

They had addressed this before. The prince had acquired an explosive temper over the years. His frustration with his inability to conquer this one little impediment to greatness often drove him to rage. He found himself creating excuses to beat any of his subordinates whom he considered a threat to his authority.

But an ill-tempered ruler was not a long-lived ruler.

The scribe added, “Now, if we can only get you to stop thinking about your words—but also without anger.”

Sobekmose tried to calm himself down. “I think it is t-t-time to turn that anger against K-k-kush.”

“Then by all means,” replied Ipuwer. “Our lesson is done.”

CHAPTER 4

Sobekmose and Ipuwer entered the holy tent of the lector priests near the prince general's own residence. The priests, Jannes and Jambres, were twin brothers in their twenties who traveled with the army to support their campaign with magic, also called *heka*, the same name of the god of magic. As lector priests, they were bald, shaven of all their hair for the purpose of sacred cleanness. They wore a simple pleated white linen kilt that was knee length with a leopard's skin over their left shoulders to their right hips. Two paws of the leopard remained as part of the pelt's ornament.

The young brothers' handsome foreign faces never seemed to age. Sobekmose had heard rumors that they'd made a deal with the gods for eternal youth. This rumor, coupled with the inability to distinguish between their identical look, added an air of spiritual mystery to their reputation.

But Sobekmose knew they were Asiatics from Avaris, the prince's own home city in Goshen, the fertile Nile delta region. "Asiatic" was the term used of all Semitic-speaking peoples from the north such as Canaan, Syria, and Asia Minor. Some called those people *Habiru*, which meant nomadic migrants, often without a country. The Asiatics in Avaris called themselves Hebrews. But the truth was that the Habiru had migrated from Canaan to the delta of Upper Egypt hundreds of years earlier. They had integrated into their host nation but remained a stubborn lot that sought special privileges for their people.

Jannes and Jambres had rejected their Habiru heritage and had joined the temple of Ra in their youth. Now they were favored priests in the king's entourage and no doubt had their eyes on the high priesthood of Ra as their ambition. That was something Sobekmose could use to his advantage.

Sobekmose and Ipuwer walked past two seven-foot copper pillars at the entrance, symbolic of world trees supporting the roof of heaven.

As they entered the darkened inner sanctuary, they were surrounded by a smokey cloud of incense. The two lector priests appeared out of the smoke

and shadows as if materializing out of the spiritual realm, a common ploy of priests to impress their visitors.

Sobekmose felt a little lightheaded from the effects of the incense. He hated not being in complete control of his senses. Though it did lessen his stammering.

The priests spoke in perfect unison. “My lord and overseer Sobekmose, son of Sobekhotep.”

“Still looking forever young, I s-see,” Sobekmose quipped. “You must tell me your secret some d-day.”

One of them, he couldn’t tell which one, said, “The secrets of Isis, my lord.”

As the mother of Horus, Isis was protector of the king, the living form of Horus. Hers was the most powerful of magic. She was known to be capable of reversing or preventing decay as she had done with Osiris’s body. These priests had obvious access to that mysterious mistress of heka.

The other one said, “May we show you what we have done to curse the city of Kerma that it may fall to the king’s mighty right hand?”

“You are mind readers as w-well,” said the general.

The twins smiled. Sobekmose added, “But w-which one is w-which again?”

“I am Jannes,” said the one on the left.

“And I am Jambres,” said the other.

What did it matter? Sobekmose still could not see the difference.

The brothers led Sobekmose and Ipuwer to the sanctuary where a small altar stood between two life-sized wooden statues of Ra and his son Horus, signifying the presence and protection of the king himself. There were some figurines and red pots on the altar. As the four approached it, Jannes, the apparent leader of the two, explained to their patrons, “Of course, we speak spells against Kerma every morning, afternoon, and evening.”

Spells, charms, and incantations were an integral part of Egyptian heka magic. It was sometimes called “art of the mouth.” The creator Ptah spoke forth creation with words. Words could bind and release, seal and destroy if spoken in the right order. Even the right words spoken well by a priest or charmer could compel the gods to respond. The most successful of lector priests were considered eloquent of word.

Jannes arrived at the altar and held up a couple of figurines made of clay with cloth coverings. Sobekmose saw that the figurines, one male, one female, had their hands tied behind their backs. Nails were driven deep into the bodies and heads of both.

“This is the chieftain of Kerma, Shakarra, and his queen, Tannia.” The figurines represented a common form of sympathetic magic, the creation of an image that represented a curse’s object. The torture and destruction of the image would then translate to real-life pain and suffering in the object it represented.

Sobekmose winced. “Was it necessary for the q-queen?”

“It is a primitive culture, my lord,” replied Jannes. “The king and queen rule together.” He threw them to the ground and stomped on them. Then Jambres reached for one of the red pots made from unbaked clay and handed it to Sobekmose.

The red color represented the evil of red-haired Set and Apophis the serpent of chaos.

The general read the writing inscribed on the pot. It was an execration text, a curse upon their enemies by name. It read, *Every rebel of this land of Kush, all people in the city of Kerma, all patricians, all commoners, all males, all women, every chieftain and warrior who rebels.* It then listed the names of King Shakarra, Queen Tannia, and other known leaders of the city that would fit on the surface of the pot. Other pots contained more names of rulers elsewhere in Kush.

“They are yours to destroy, my lord,” Jannes said.

Sobekmose threw the pot hard onto the ground so that it was smashed into pieces. He continued with the other pots until they were all in broken shards on the floor around them. The heka ritual “breaking of the red pots” was supposed to bring destruction upon those listed on the pots in yet another sympathetic connection of magical curse.

Sobekmose thought he heard a soft breathy sound behind him. “Mio.”

It was his pet name. Only the closest in his family called him that. He turned around. Saw nothing.

“My lord?” Ipuwer asked.

“I thought I heard...n-nothing,” said the general. “We are done here.” He turned to the two lector priests. “C-carry on.”

The two of them left the sanctuary.

Jannes and Jambres looked at each other with curiosity.

They turned to face the altar as two large seven-foot-tall figures glided out from the shadows. The priests bowed to the floor and spoke in unison. “My queen, O Isis, who knows all the names. Mighty Heka, he who speaks magic.”

“Up with you,” Isis said.

The priests raised to their knees and looked upon her beautiful form. It was hazy in the incense, and their senses drugged by sorcery were dulled. But they could see her. They were both seers, capable of seeing beings of the unseen realm with unusual sensitivity.

What they saw was glorious. Isis, pale white of skin, wore a translucent white gown that revealed her sensuous shape beneath. She had a bright shoulder-wide necklace of jewels, black bobbed hair that came down to her shoulders, and an oversized crown that consisted of a circular golden sun surrounded by two curved horns of deity. She moved with smooth elegance, and when she raised her arms, colorful wings could be seen attached along their outer edges.

Though the goddess was female, there was something that seemed masculine beneath her makeup and dress. Jannes had noticed this of all the goddesses he had been allowed to see. But he brushed it aside as a mystery.

Heka was a male with the much simpler dress of a lector priest: white pleated kilt but no leopard skin on his bare chest. He wore a bobbed wig of black hair and sported a tight curved beard of divinity. He carried two snakes in his hands that maintained a stiff statue-like state, making them look like staffs. Both Heka’s and Isis’s eyes were deep blue like the precious heavenly gem lapis lazuli. All the gods’ eyes were this heavenly blue.

Jannes queried, “Why did you not show your glory to my general, O shining ones?”

“Beware that one,” warned Isis. “He is not as he appears.”

“I do not understand,” Jannes admitted.

“He must not become king.”

Jannes dared not ask the question. The priests had received a prophesy many years ago of one to come called “The Destroyer of Egypt.” Was the god

implying a connection? To even consider such a thing about the crown prince would be treason.

Jambres asked, “What should we do, my queen?”

“Stay alert and prepared. We will call upon you when your services are required.”

She was referring to the covenant the twins had made with the goddess a generation ago in the days of Neferhotep I. The lector priests had been called upon to persuade the king to perform a massacre of male infants of their own people, the Hebrews. It was a terrible thing to ask of them, so in exchange for their service, they had received eternal youth. But that youth would only last as long as their obedience.

Jannes and Jambres bowed and spoke in unison. “We await your command, O queen, throne goddess, she who knows all the names.”