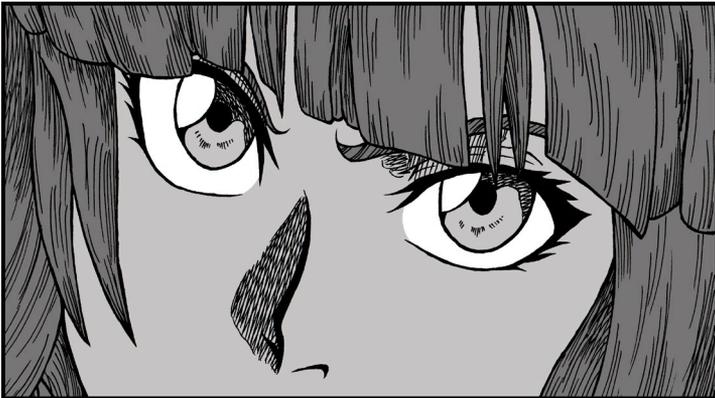


OWL SHOGUN STUDIOS



**BOOK V:  
REGIS BLOOD**



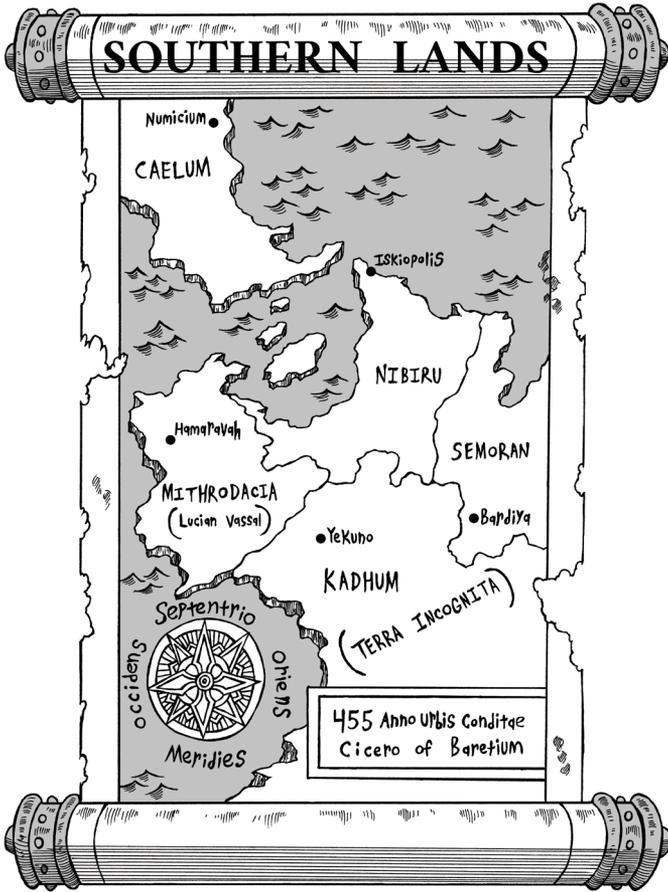
**Story & Art By:  
JOSH ALICEA**

S.P.Q.L



SENATUS · POPULUSQUE · LUCIANUS

# REGIONAL MAP



**REGION:** Theia (Southern Lands)

**YEAR:** 455 AUC (Anno Urbis Conditae)



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This is a **fantasy** inspired by **history**...

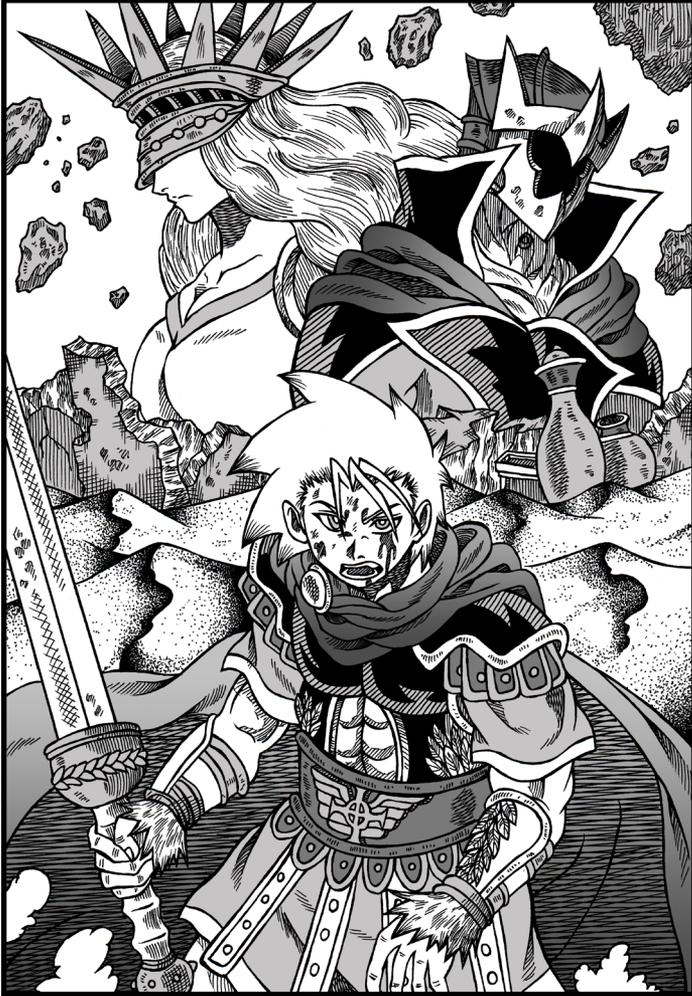
The **Deorum Legions**<sup>TM</sup> universe derives its essence from the old **Greco-Roman** world of classic antiquity. It is a setting of legionary armies, magnificent cities, ancient gods, mighty gladiators, mythical beings, and much more.

It is a cruel, violent, and unjust place. There is slavery, death, war, and all manner of strong themes that may not be suitable for some audiences. This book is not meant for the faint of heart nor the easily outraged. Read at your own discretion.

Most critically, this series of books is meant to emulate the unique **Japanese storytelling** tradition of **shōnen** manga with **seinen** characteristics. Now turn the page, dear reader, and let us now embark on this magnificent journey together...

- The Owl Shogun

**Book 5**  
**Regis Blood**



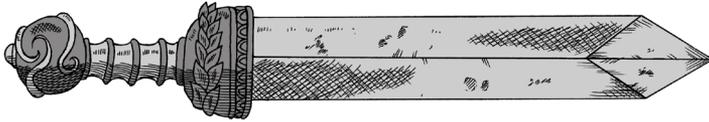
**The Nibiru Arc**

**Story & Art:**  
Josh Alicea



# I

## DREAMS OF YESTERYEAR



For as long as Nibiru has existed as a people and as a nation, there has always been a pharaoh. This is the one constant in an ever-changing world. These supreme rulers have, for several millennia, stewarded a civilization truly without peer. Who has not, at least once in their lives, sought to gaze upon the wonders of Nibiru? It is a land steeped in history and tradition unrivaled in all of Theia.

To the willful traveler who seeks an adventure of unbridled possibility, you are spoiled for choice. No matter which land you hail from, the moment you drop the anchors of your vessel, you are immediately taken aback by the sheer grandeur of Iskiopolis and her enchanting buildings of marble and gold. Once you've walked through the breathtaking streets of this magnificent city, the capitals of all other nations shall never satisfy again.

But Nibiru is so much more than her glistening capital. As you sail down the mystical Amun River, you are presented with a cornucopia of ancient sites whose age and history reaches far back into the mists of time. One can bask in awe under the shadows of the mighty pyramids of Zahure or worship at a number of holy sites in cities like Seth and Djoser. You can also explore the mortuary

temples of dead rulers in Semerkhet. And for the truly daring adventurer, one might even risk the endless deserts which abound to find all manner of lost riches.

The Oracles claim that Nibiru is older than time itself – the birthplace of humanity. This is reflected in their gods, which they refer to as the Netjeru. Enmeh, Oanpu, and Baz are but a few of these primordial beings from which all other gods descend. Even our revered Loraeus, the Lucian Romula, or the Hyperborean Mannus all pale when stacked against such prestigious ancestry. It is little wonder that we Lemurians, whom the Lucians have ungracefully copied, have to some extent derived our own cultural essence from the Nibirians. But there is another who's parentage merits awe – that being the divine lineage of Nibiru's Pharaohs.

Sema-Tawy, known in life simply as Pohteru, was the first great unifier of the two lands. It was he alone who brought the knowledge of agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry. It was he who bestowed the Nibirians with the gift of the written word. It was he who held back the ever-expanding domain of chaos, saving the Amun from being swallowed up by desert. It was he who established the priesthood, the temples, and even the first city of man.

It was for this and much more that the supreme god, Enmeh, rewarded Sema-Tawy with the **Book of Kings**, thus declaring him Pharaoh of all Nibiru. This Book of Kings would then be passed onto his son, Sekhemwy. And thus, it has been the case that all rulers since have been granted the supposed Book of Kings. But what exactly is this mysterious book?

Many among you are already familiar with the often-morose Book of the Dead; a vast collection of hymns, chants, and numerous sacred spells. With it, one can enter the afterlife armed with divine protection and ensure their passage onto the Field of Reeds. You can even purchase a copy for a few drachmae from any vendor in Iskiopolis.

But the Book of Kings is, contrary to its name, not a book. It is a seal. What this "*book*" seals has been a subject of fierce debate by scholars for centuries. Only the upper echelon of the priesthood

and the royal court is privy to such information. Thankfully, bits and pieces have come down to us with the excavation of countless ancient tablets previously lost to the sands of time. Etched upon these stone stelae are voices of the past which reveal only the faintest semblance of clues. Some say that the Book of Kings is not a seal, but in fact, a key. This “key” may very well open a hidden vault containing a great power unlike anything that we have ever seen. At least, not since the fall and disappearance of the Seraphim.

Is this power the very thing that enabled these ancient people to dominate the whole of Kosmos? Is this how they were able to create such technological wonders for which we have very little understanding of? Was it also the very reason for their downfall? Sadly, we simply do not know. All I can say with assuredness is that he or she who claims the mantle of Pharaoh shall become the gatekeeper to this lost and terrible secret. That, my friends, is the Book of Kings. That is the power of Nibiru’s Pharaohs...

### *On The Power of The Pharaohs*

Asclepion of Vediovis

---

417 Anno Urbis Conditae

Iskiopolis, Nibiru

The young boys held onto that dusty old scroll with a firm grip; their gaze fixated upon its unearthly contents. The scroll is stretched wide over a cold and hard granite floor. Situated nearby are an assortment of small oil lamps of varying sizes which can only offer *some* minor illumination. Surrounding their little sanctuary of light is a vast and doleful darkness which conceals a vast library of sorts. The premises house thousands of rolled up papyrus scrolls and stone tablets. In one corner of this solemn chamber stands an entire row of artifacts and seemingly ancient wares.

So immersed are they by the words of this long-dead historian that they had forgotten where they were for the briefest of moments. They effectively knew nothing about who Asclepion of Vediovis was, nor did they really care. Yet his discourse on *"The Power of The Pharaohs"* had certainly intrigued them despite their rather youthful age. One of the boys was Ankihotep, who at this point had seen no less than twelve summers. Accompanying him was his brother and senior by one year, Khemet.

Being sons of the Pharaoh, there is very little that can stave off the ever-persistent thorn of boredom. What is a child to do when literally anything and everything can be provided by a mere whim? They can receive whatever they desire, be it trinkets or food. And whatever commands they utter are promptly followed by their endless retinue of loyal servants without question. Certainly, this is an envious life that few in the kingdom would ever experience. And yet all the same, boredom always came knocking. Thus, they often took the liberty of exploring every nook and cranny of their most palatial of homes.

It was a common occurrence for the two brothers to sneak around the palace in search of a means to amuse themselves. It mattered little that their own clothes were of the finest quality or that every room and hall within this vast complex was fitted with only the grandest of décor. What they truly yearned for was excitement – a more long-term cessation of courtly conduct and royal etiquette in favor of something more unusual. What they craved was adventure; a desire which all youths can relate to. In the absence of such things, they often took refuge in the comfort of books.

Piles of old papyrus are scattered all around them; indicative of their ravenous appetite for knowledge. But no

books had captivated them quite like the alluring words of Asclepion. Unfortunately for them, the text seems to have faded and was cut short almost prematurely. Ankihotep, puzzled by this, stretches the scroll as far as it will go in search for more.

“Brother...” The eldest urges. “We should get going before we are both caught.”

“Just a moment, Khemet.” The youngest sibling replies; searching in vain for just one extra word or passage. “I... I don’t understand... That cannot be all there is to it.”

“Most of the works here are fragmentary as best. Very little survives from the old days. Why don’t we instead go to the Great Library? The scholars there have made a bunch of copies that we can *actually* read.”

“I’m not interested in that filth.”

“Filth?” Khemet repeats with surprise. “Are the words of Euphoros or Alexion so trivial?”

“No, I just...” He then sighs. “It’s not the same. There are things here deemed forbidden to the outside world... Things even *father* fears... I wish to know what is so terrible a secret that even the most powerful man in all of Theia considers it a taboo.”

“What if we aren’t *meant* to know such things? I mean, they’re forbidden for a reason.”

“Come on, Khemet. We are both descended from the Netjeru, are we not? This world belongs to us. Therefore, nothing should be beyond our reach.”

Somewhat in agreement, Khemet hesitantly helps his younger brother scour the shelves for anything that might help to unravel the mysteries of the world. Like a pair of studious mice, they scan every section for anything that can point them in the right direction. Eventually, they find it.

“Khemet, look at this!” He calls with an acute whisper.  
“The Book of Kings...? Huh.”

The two youths, their little hearts starting to flutter, slowly unfurl the fragile scroll and gaze upon its coveted contents. However, just as they are about to delve into the material, the sound of clanging doors and heavy footsteps promptly deters them.

“Damn... Those must be the priests.”

“Hurry!” Khemet urges. “This way.”

With immediacy, they close the scroll and tiptoe away in search of an exit. Hidden behind a collection of bulky chariots and other artifacts harking to the old kingdom period, the two brothers stretch their necks out and are alarmed to see several priests roaming the chamber. They each wear a mishmash of fabrics such as linen or cloth with portions of animal skins from cheetahs and crocodiles. With only some miniscule candles to guide their path, the priests traverse through these chambers until stumbling upon the disheveled pile of scrolls left behind by the siblings.

“Find them.” One elderly priest commands.

As ordered, the other priests spread out and survey the area with the express intent of catching their little intruders. Dismayed, the youngsters silently sneak around; relying on the cover of darkness and other nearby objects in order to conceal their whereabouts. Thanks to their size, they scurry along without attracting any undue attention. But right as they are nearing the exit, a priest discovers them; having purposely positioned himself next to the door.

“Khemet and Ankihotep.” The priest snickers with a devious grin. “Why am I not surprised?”

“Oh umm... Hello, Neferkare... Sir.” Khemet mumbles with beads of sweat dripping down his anxious brow.

“You know that the Royal Archives is off-limits to those outside the priesthood. Your father warned you.”

“We won’t trespass again.” Khemet promises.

“We were only curious.” Ankihotep casually posits.

“Brother, what are you – ”

“If we’re to be rulers one day, then should we not know *all* of Nibiru’s secrets? Even forbidden ones?”

Neferkare gazes upon the perceptive Ankihotep with a stern visage. He is impressed by his desire to learn but also taken aback by his willingness to disobey rules. The youth certainly possesses a different personality to Khemet’s much softer and more agreeable nature. But in keeping with his priestly duties, Neferkare places his foot down.

“The Royal Archives contain sensitive material which is not permitted beyond the walls of the palace.” Neferkare carefully explains. “Much of it is arcane or even dangerous. Only those like myself are authorized to even *touch* these scrolls. If you wish to unveil the truths of this world, then you will need your father’s blessing. Else, I am bound by his will. Now come with me, my princes.”

Without further recourse, the two mischievous boys follow Neferkare out of the dark archives and onto a most immaculate hallway. A colonnade of herculean hypostyle pillars keep the heavenly ceiling in place. These massive structures dwarf even the largest of men. Carved into the stones are detailed depictions of mythical scenes of the gods enhanced by vibrant colors. The ceiling itself dazzles with bluish hues and a mesmerizing canopy of painted stars. The walls of this majestic corridor are graced by hieroglyphic symbols abundant with royal propaganda. The polished limestone floors are graced with fine carpets which span the entire length of the passageway. Pressed tightly against these

pictorial walls are masterfully sculpted statues made of granite or dark obsidian which portray the Netjeru and the Pharaohs of old. While there are a plethora of windows that allow sunlight to bleed into the hallway, it is through the crackling flames of iron braziers where most of the interior illumination comes from.

In time, they exit the grandiose halls and egress onto an outdoor bridge which connects numerous sections of the royal palace. This gives the boys a most divine view of the capital which seems to sprawl in all directions well past the historical center... Almost like a lotus blossom. They notice the sounds of triumphant music being played near the port. A large quinquereme has just arrived not too long ago from the looks of it. And judging by the density of the crowds below and their jubilancy, the brothers conclude that they must be important.

"Another dignitary has arrived?" Ankihotep comments with slight annoyance. "Father sure is busy as of late."

"Who is it *this* time?" Khemet innocently asks.

"You see the sails of that ship?" Neferkare kindly points out. "The red dyes and the golden eagle? That's the insignia of the Lucian Republic. Their consul is aboard that vessel."

"Consul?" Khemet recites. "Is that their king?"

"Not quite... Lucium does not have a monarch which rules with blessings from the gods. In their custom, it is the people who elect leaders to represent them."

"A ludicrous idea!" Ankihotep scoffs. "What do the people know of ruling? But then... That means that this consul, or whatever you call it, is lesser than father."

"Brother, please... Is each land not entitled to their own form of self-rule? Even if it differs from our own? We were always taught to respect our neighbors."

“Sapient words, my prince.” Neferkare chuckles. “You have learned much from your father. But Ankihotep is not wrong either.” He then pauses to kneel on the floor and taps both siblings on the shoulders. “Never forget that Nibiru has always been the supreme civilization. We have existed since the beginning of time. And thus, we shall endure to the end of days when all other empires have been swallowed up by encroaching sands.” He then stands back up. “Now go to your chambers. I’ll notify your father to come visit once he has concluded his meeting.”

With that, priest Neferkare splits from them and walks back in the direction of the Royal Archives. Ankihotep and Khemet continue in their current outdoor path until they are back inside the palace-proper and trudge endlessly along another grand and stunning hypostyle hall.

“Why do you always do that?” Khemet accuses.

“Do what?”

“You always feel the need to constantly belittle anyone who’s different. It’s wrong... Some might call it hubris.”

“My silly brother. You heard Neferkare, didn’t you? Nibiru is the greatest of all lands. That should fill your heart with pride. It’s almost as if you *resent* it.”

“Father says that people from all nations are unique expressions of the gods and no less worthy of their love.”

“Bah! Father forgets himself! We are Nibirian.”

“We are also *Lemurian*, Ankihotep.” Khemet corrects with concerned eyes. “Our ancestors came from afar long before they conquered Nibiru.”

“That’s ancient history.”

“Which you conveniently ignore.”

“Oh, enough with your whining, Khemet. Now do you want to see father meet with that foreigner or not?”

“But... We aren’t allowed.”

“Can’t you think for yourself?” The younger brother spouts with a cynical smirk. “No one has to know.”

\*\*\*

Once the tall and mighty seafaring vessel from Caelum is adequately docked, soldiers begin to pour out in droves. Iskiopolis is of course no stranger to foreign delegations paying visit to their venerable Pharaoh. Every month or so, Nibiru will receive a vast array of characters. Among such fine guests are ambassadors from the Lemurian city-states, Semoran chiefs, Mithrodacian princes, Maldekian nobility, Iramese satraps, and – on rare occasions – a representative from the loathsome Kadhumite tribes. But visitation from *Lucium* is an annual event met with great anticipation and fanfare amongst the resident Iskiopolitans.

Marching down the cobbled streets of the Nibirian capital are the resolute soldiers of the legions. Their very visage inspires awe and wonder amongst the people who clamor to catch a glimpse of these fearsome warriors. With few exceptions, the vast majority of legionnaires are clad in the iconic lorica musculata which consists of a dark metallic cuirass, greaves, bracers, red tunics, leather boots, and a brilliant crimson cape with a numerical designation of their respective legion emblazoned onto the very fabric. Parading towards the Royal Palace in tight and neat formations, they eventually divide into two rows; forming a spacious corridor which allows the consul to comfortably walk between.

The consul himself is dressed in a blindingly white toga with faint hints of purple dye stretched along the length of his body. It is apparent that he wears a lorica underneath these garments for additional protection. His shoulders are

draped in a white cape which flows with the gusting of the winds. Atop his head is a simple laurel wreath covered in goldleaf. As he and his plethora of soldiers continue their pace towards the palace, the locals become enamored by the consul's appearance. His gait expresses a sense of purpose and self-assuredness. This impression is further enhanced by the magnificent legionary banners and the sounds of melodic trumpets and bombastic war drums which reverberate all throughout the area.

Ankihotep and Khemet both observe this procession from atop a high balcony. Khemet is, like many of his fellow Nibirians, roused by the Lucian's stylistic entrance. But as for his brother, Ankihotep appears unmoved by their arrival. In fact, he seems repulsed.

"Look at those fools... They march into our city and act as if they own the place."

"That man in white." Khemet points out. "He must be the consul Neferkare spoke of."

As the Lucians approach the palace, the legion stays behind to secure any and all exits as the consul steps inside. He is met by Neferkare and various other officials who escort him to a secret room deep within the palace grounds. After several minutes of navigating these labyrinthian halls, the consul enters the designated meeting point. Patiently sitting there on a golden curule chair is the king.

"Jhaferu-Ra Rehmajhut... The Pharaoh of Nibiru. It is an honor to finally make your acquaintance."

"The feeling is quite mutual, Consul Vitellius. I trust that your voyage was an agreeable one?"

"Long and boring." He chuckles as he sips on wine placed on a nearby table. "I feel much more comfortable on firm soil. Although, I'm truly impressed with this city. There

isn't a boy or girl in all of Caelum who hasn't heard tales of the Pharaohs and their great capital of Iskiopolis."

"I once visited Lucium myself when I was a boy. Your founder, Lucius, would've been proud had he lived to see what your Republic has become."

Ankihotep and Khemet scurry in an attempt to get a better view but halt upon seeing the guards. Thwarted but undeterred, they search for another way to catch a glimpse of these high-level talks. Yet no matter which entrance they try, the royal guards are there to prevent any unauthorized personnel from interrupting the meeting.

"It's no use... There's too many of them."

"Watch this."

With bated breath, Ankihotep slowly approaches two heavily armored guards. Feigning an innocent persona, the deceitful boy resorts to simple trickery. Pretending to be utterly distressed, he speaks softly so as to alert *only* the two men before him.

"Guards! Guards! I just saw a man sneaking into the palace. He looks scary! I think he means us harm!"

Absent hesitation, the two armed soldiers tighten the grip of their spears and run towards the very direction where Ankihotep had pointed. One of them addresses the youth.

"Stay here, my prince. We'll handle it."

"Oh, thank you, brave sirs."

With that, the guards are unwittingly deceived by a twelve-year-old child as they hurry to quell an imaginary threat. Looking back at his older brother with a grin, the boy sneaks inside. The eldest sibling quickly follows.

"I can't believe that actually worked." Khemet whispers in disappointment.

"And now the path is clear."

They tiptoe into the room where their venerable father is conducting his meeting with the Lucian leader and hide behind a cluster of massive clay amphorae. Secure in the knowledge that they would not be discovered, at least for now, they huddle closely to the cold marble floor and listen to the words of these titans of the Theian world.

Their father's head is covered by a nemes headdress composed of gold and blue stripes. The uraeus, the golden cobra, adorns the top of the nemes. Hanging from his chin is a metallic fake beard made of shiny bronze. Upon his broad shoulders is an usekh collar decorated in multicolored rows of gems. Among this dazzling array of precious stones are turquoise, carnelian, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, amethyst, topaz, and lapis lazuli. His body is covered in a most pristine silk robe of pure white. His lower body is finely dressed in an ornate shendyt kilt made up of numerous materials and fabrics. Together, these disparate elements of clothing give their father a godly aura befitting a divine king.

In comparison to this overt regality, the leader of the Lucians is no more than a mere commoner playing politics. And yet, the consul remains ever calm; as if their father's pharaonic visage held no tangible bearing in their talks. Standing next to the consul is a trusted centurion. Next to Jhaferu is Neferkare and a small retinue of soldiers. To the younger brother's annoyance, they had already begun their talks. Although, their cordial greetings seemed to have given way to more pressing matters.

"Kessalonia... Ilium... Southern Hyperborea and now vast portions of Mithrodacia... These are all relatively recent acquisitions in your ever-expanding empire." Jhaferu states.

"*Acquisition* is such an unsightly word. We are merely defending ourselves against foreign aggression."

“Regardless of the intent, your blatant militarism has garnered ill will amongst our neighbors.”

“And who, might I ask, spreads such slander?”

“Everyone.” The Pharaoh says. “They have all confided in me. I speak of these things to you only in the interest of maintaining peace in the region. Some now fear that you and your ilk aim to conquer the whole of Theia.”

“Oh, that is pure scandal!” Vitellius dismisses. “The senate and the people of Lucium have no such inclinations. We desire *only* to strengthen our borders and bolster the security of the homeland – hardly nefarious things.”

“And where does *Nibiru* fit within this grand design?”

“You needn’t worry.” The consul smirks. “Lucium and Nibiru are as friends; just as we’ve always been.”

“That is true...” Jhaferu agrees. “But only so long as I keep the grain shipments coming.”

“And in exchange, we have helped to build your roads and bridges. We’ve invested in infrastructure and housing. We’ve restored your temples and aided in your defenses against those Kadhumite wretches. In exchange for precious grain, Lucian engineers have modernized Nibiru. A fair and prosperous relationship, wouldn’t you say?”

“And what is the price for this continued friendship?”

“The same as last year plus an additional 35 percent.”

“Thirty-five? Why so much?”

“Times are changing.” Vitellius says as he casually rests his back against his chair. “The Lucian people keep breeding like rabbits you see; sprouting children as though its going out of fashion. Alas, they must eat.”

“Your predecessor and I agreed to a fixed amount. I’ve my own people to feed and other nations to sell to.”

“He’s not consul now... I am, and *I* demand 35.”

“The annual flood was... Poorer this year... We must consolidate our resources so that we do not starve.”

“I grieve with you.” Vitellius states with a betraying smile. “But that’s not my problem, is it?”

“Lucium will get the same as before... No more.”

Insulted by the Pharaoh’s stubbornness, the arrogant consul corrects his posture and leans forth to meet his gaze.

“My history might be a little fuzzy.” Vitellius calmly jests. “But wasn’t Nibiru under foreign occupation before Iskios the Great pushed the Semorans out of your lands?”

“That is correct.” Jhaferu confirms; unsure as to where he is going with this.

“It was *then* that the Nibirian people declared Iskios as pharaoh, right? How ironic. One foreign ruler is replaced by another. Your ancestors did the same thing... History often repeats itself, I suppose.”

“You speak of threats.”

“Oh, I assure you, dear Jhaferu. I levy no threats. For us, Nibiru is but a boat ride away. The Republic has no qualms with liberating our allies in the fight against tyranny.”

“Nibiru will never accept foreign domination.”

“Your House of Soter has done remarkably well for the last several hundred years, despite being Lemurians. I’m certain that Nibiru can tolerate a Lucian dynasty.”

Consul Vitellius then rises up from his chair and walks towards the monarch; inching closely so that he can hover over him. This act of disrespect infuriates his sons. Khemet watches with shock as this foreigner imposes his will. As for Ankihotep, a burning rage begins to fester within.

“But it need not come to such extremes.” The consul smirks. “After all, I only want an additional 35 percent... Is that *really* worth going to war over?”

\*\*\*

Hours after the meeting concludes, night envelops the two lands; prompting Pharaoh Jhaferu to retire to his private quarters. It had been a long and arduous day. His mind had grown weary, and his body ached. In his younger years, he could perform his duties with such ease. But now, the ravages of time are eating away at him. How cruel ageing is, he thought. It has a knack of rendering feeble even the most capable of men. Perhaps this very affliction has become the fate of his kingdom?

Time... So plentiful a commodity yet so finite... For untold ages, Nibiru was the premier land with riches that surpassed all. Foreign rulers used to look to the Pharaohs for guidance and legitimacy. Nothing occurred without Nibiru having its say. But... That was *then*... Times are indeed changing. New powers have risen and continue to rise. All the while, Nibiru's star fades. Has it, as Jhaferu fears, become the *Old Man of Theia*? And if so, what is Nibiru's ultimate destiny within the theatre of history?

This mournful thought process is interrupted as soon as he enters his bedchamber. Standing there are his two sons, Khemet and Ankihotep. They appear to be less enthused than usual. Although, given the rigors of the day, the sight of his own progeny is a welcome distraction.

"The guards informed me that you spotted an intruder of sorts. But of course, they found no such thing." He then walks towards them and smiles. "Were you two so eager to catch a glimpse of my meeting?"

"If we are to rule one day, then it makes sense that we see your work with our own eyes." Ankihotep responds.

Amused by this statement, Jhaferu chuckles and sits down upon his bed. He then gestures for his two sons to sit

next to him as well. Khemet sat to the right while Ankihotep kept to the Pharaoh's left.

"Khemet... Ankihotep... You are both too young to burden yourselves with such trivialities. I prefer that you enjoy your youths, for in the future, you will lean on the memories of such fond days for comfort."

"Why did you let him walk over you like that?"

"Brother!"

"You speak of Vitellius?"

"That man is but a lowly foreigner... You are Pharaoh, the King of Kings. And yet, that scum dared to threaten our people with war."

"Forgive him, father." Khemet pleads. "He's been most agitated on account of bad fish."

However, Jhaferu took no offense by this outburst. He simply taps Ankihotep on the shoulders and inquires.

"What would you have done if *you* were Pharaoh?"

This simple question spurs the child to ponder deeply over his every word.

"I... I would do as you instructed me. To defend the lives and dignity of our people. I would have executed that man on the spot for his insolence."

"And how do you think the legions would react to the murder of their consul?"

"I... Imagine war would ensue... But we would be just in our cause. The Netjeru would bring us victory."

Upon hearing this, Jhaferu-Ra Rehmajut rises from his bed and begins to pace around the room in order to collect his thoughts. Khemet and Ankihotep look at each other with puzzled stares. The Pharaoh then halts his gait upon seeing a large map of Theia plastered on the wall. This detailed mosaic is made up of thousands upon thousands of tiny tiles

which form a wondrous image of ecumene – the known world. At the bottom of this map is Nibiru, Mithrodacia, and Kadhum. To the east is Semoran, Iram, and Lemuria. To the north is Maldek and Hyperborea. And to the west is the burgeoning power of Caelum. No more is that land host to a diverse collection of autonomous tribes. Lucium had grown to swallow the whole peninsula and he fears that their thirst has yet to be quenched... Finally, he speaks.

“Long ago, people all across Theia feared the might of Nibiru. Any who were foolish enough to challenge us were met with total defeat. But the world is not as it once was... Many of the old powers have come and gone. Upon their ruins, new people have risen to take their place. One group in particular holds immense promise. And perhaps one day, they may achieve the very thing that Sema-Tawy and Iskios failed to uphold... A lasting unification of Theia.”

“You speak of the Lucians?” Ankihotep questions. “But father, they are merely a tribe of sheep and goat herders.”

“I’m with brother on this.” Khemet adds. “It’s hard to believe that a country as young as Lucium can ever hope to match us. We precede them by thousands of years.”

“We were not so different in the beginning.” Jhaferu posits. “We too hail from humble origins.” He then sits back down with his sons and sighs. “I am no prophet... But I fear that our time under the sun is nearly at an end. Better to be *friends* with Lucium than to be *subservient* to them. If we aren’t careful, we might end up as just another acquisition in their growing empire. When I am gone, it will fall on the two of you to protect this kingdom from such a fate.”

Ankihotep, mulling over these words, reaches into his kilt and removes from it a scroll taken from the archives. He then unrolls it and presents it to his father.

“Brother, you stole it?!”

“What about the Book of Kings, father? According to this, it is a great power bestowed to us by the very gods themselves. With it, we can defeat our enemies and restore Nibiru back to its rightful place at the top. We’ll show those Lucian dogs who their master truly is.”

Jhaferu extends an arm, beckoning Ankihotep to hand the scroll over to him. The Pharaoh then sifts through its contents for only the briefest of moments. He then redirects his gaze towards the young boy.

“So you were snooping around the Royal Archives as well, eh?” Jhaferu says with disapproval. “You know that is expressly forbidden.”

“We were bored.”

“No matter... The Book of Kings is a myth.”

“But this scroll says that we can save our people. With it, we can restore the greatness of – ”

“ENOUGH!” The Pharaoh shouts. “Many before you have searched their entire lives for it, only to perish in the pursuit. It is but a phantasm of the desert. Take heed, child. There *is* no Book of Kings. We shall speak of this no more!”

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Later that evening, when the moon had reached its zenith, Ankihotep and Khemet laid upon their cushiony beds. Ever since they were newborns, the two had always shared the same room; albeit now they are granted their own beds. The excitements of the day instilled in them a stubborn restlessness that robbed them of sleep. As Ankihotep tosses and turns, Khemet watches him with anxious annoyance.

“Ankihotep... We need to get some sleep.”

“I can’t stop thinking about it.”

“Will you just let it go? Father says it doesn’t exist.”

“He’s lying... I *know* he is. If the Book of Kings wasn’t real, then there wouldn’t be so much written material about it. And why store its secrets in the archives? It’s gotta be real. They just don’t want anyone to know the truth.”

“Even so, you heard father. Everyone who has ever tried to find it ends up dead. To me, it seems like a fool’s errand. A fiction can’t solve our problems.”

“We don’t have the luxury of doubt... Lucium grows bolder every day... So much so that they insulted father... We have lost our way... The gods weep over our weakness.”

“Now you sound crazy... Lucium isn’t going to invade us. People say all sorts of things to convince others to do what they want... It’s just politics.”

“And if that day does indeed come? Will we be ready when the legions march upon our home? What if they take us away as slaves? What then?”

“They would never do that.” Khemet says; somewhat unsure and disturbed by the very thought.

“Those Lucians are savages.” Ankihotep insists. “They know nothing of decency or civility.”

“Okay... Let’s say you’re right... Let’s say that the Lucians *actually* plan to turn Nibiru into a province. We’re just kids. What can *we* possibly do to change things?”

Ankihotep takes a moment to think over his brother’s point. There is some merit to Khemet’s words; much to his frustration. He then gazes up at a tiny oculus which allows gentle streaks of moonlight to enter the room. The Nibirian cosmological tradition teaches that all worldly phenomena are the workings of the gods. The sun, the river, the rain, the desert, and the stars are all aspects of their divine nature. Even the moon, resplendent with lunar luminance, is part of

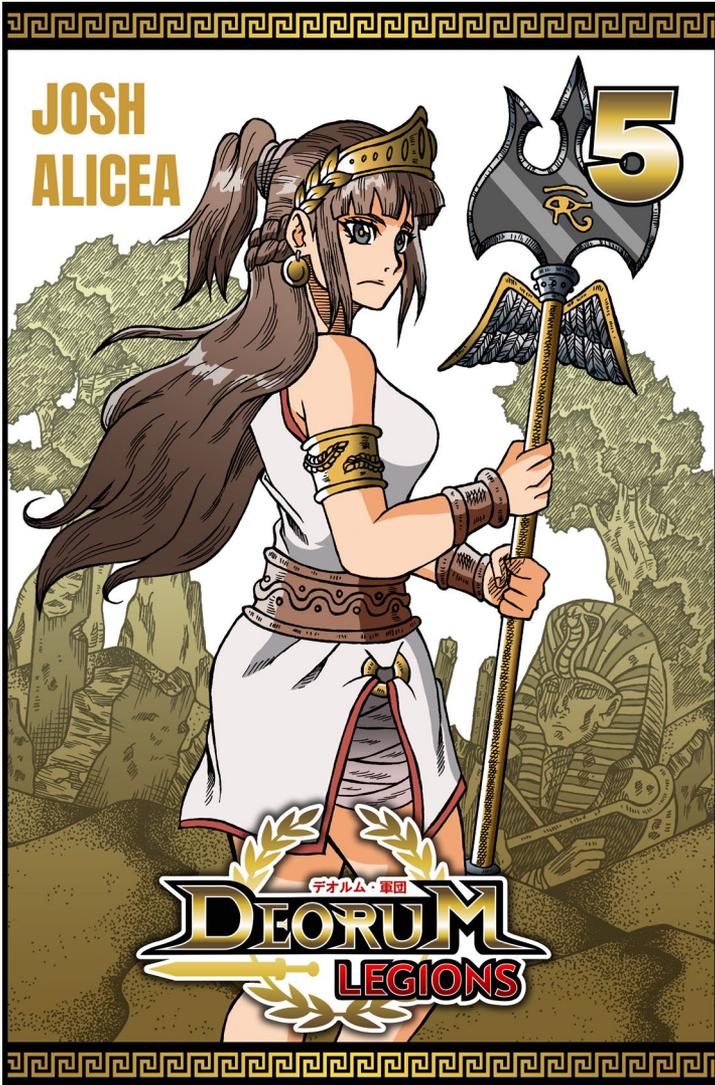
the Netjeru. As Ankihotep stares longingly at the celestial sphere in all its radiance, he swears an oath to the gods as to the firmness of his own conviction.

“One day, I’m going to find the Book of Kings.”

“If it exists.” Khemet taunts.

“And if it does... We’ll have the power to set the world straight again... We shall become the gods of Theia.”

THANKS FOR READING



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