



DEAD AND RETURNED HITTITE WARRIOR

HISTORY

Once you were part of the great Hittite Empire, called Hatti, which stretched from Troy to far Assyria. The country was fertile, looked after by a royal court by turns benevolent and tyrannical; it sent out ships to trade and make war with the Phoenicians, clashed with the upstart Greek hill tribes, and enthusiastically suppressed the strange tribes of the desert forever licking at its eastern and southern borders. Perhaps you worked in the offices of the Gal Mesedi, the commander of the King or Queen's personal bodyguard; or perhaps for the Gal Gestin, the Chief of the Wine Stewards, a supremely prestigious office with its own troops and oversight of divine festivals. Or perhaps you were a bureaucrat toiling among the numberless thousands under the Gal Dubsar, the Chief of Scribes, to catalogue and classify and do honour to the Empire's numberless gods.

Whoever you were – you died. And, for a time, all is well. After all, you had done proper honour to your household gods, your village gods, and the great gods of the Empire; your family had made proper sacrifice and washed the huwasi stone set to watch over your grave. Your funeral goods were casketed in cedarwood and incense was burned over your resting place. The Hittite underworld was not a bad place, all told – a little chaotic, perhaps, as a hundred minor gods of death squabbled and scrambled for territory and capital; but with minor upsets, you had the rest you long deserved.

All that changed when the world ended.

The more recently dead speak of a great sin – a crime against the Gods; or they speak of a great rebellion, a rising up of an oppressed people too long suffering under the conflicting and nonsensical demands of power-mad divinities. Whatever the politics of the matter, the truth seems to be that the great philosophers and heroes of the Hittite Empire began a campaign of calculated deicide. With so many Gods, spread so thinly across the expanse of the Empire, they were horrifyingly successful. First the deities of rivers, small villages and local weather systems; then the guardian-deities of provinces, professions and livestock; and finally the great storm-gods, Kings and Queens of the pantheon, fell before the merciless advance of the philosophers. Soon, even the death-gods were hunted across their heavens and shattered into oblivion; you struggle to remember their names. Lelwani, chief among the gods of the Dead, was the last to fall. With her death came madness.

Unstable, your underworld was thrown into furore. Your spirit's home for years or generations was suddenly at the mercy of unthinking cosmic forces. Countless thousands of souls were torn screaming into the void, to vanish into nonexistence, before one of the mortal philosophers began to hit upon a plan; in the chaos of the collapsing Magisterium, as the nature of the Hittite culture itself began to unravel, he performed an act of great magic. Somehow, through will and cunning, he *embodied* your Underworld, holding it safe within himself as he – once a Philosopher-King, now a refugee among thousands – escaped the storm-tossed chaos of bloodshed and civil upheaval that the Empire had become.

For a hundred years, or a thousand – time passes oddly when you are dead – all was well. The new Underworld was different; quieter, with no Gods to oversee it; chaotic, with no guiding force but Hattusilis' will to keep it in check. You remained; you persisted. Lulled to a sleep by the dark waters



of Lelwani's abandoned lake, or recreating memories of existence among the dark cypress-trees of the groves of shadow, you passed your time not ungently. It was no Paradise, but nor was it a punishment, and you were haunted by the screams of those spirits who were not as lucky as you.

At the Eleventh Annual, the gates of the Underworld were torn asunder. For the first time in an eternity, you saw a glimpse of a world outside the dark trees and spreading, gentle forgetfulness of your rest. You heard the siren call of birdsong, laughter, you saw glimpses of colour and light you had forgotten existed. You reached for a fragment of hope...

...and you walked upon the earth once again. In a single moment, you were restored to life, staggering on new-minted feet, only the cross on your forehead to distinguish you from the living – at least to an idle glance.

Perhaps you fully intended an escape from the prison of Hattusilis' makeshift rescue; perhaps you wanted only a sojourn upon the earth before returning, content, to your slumber. You and your fellows were in the minority; most of your fellow dead did not understand – or choose not to see – the opportunity set before them. You thought, at first, that perhaps they were the lucky ones, content with their lot, with no burning will to push them out into a world of confusion and pain.

The Middle Sea is a strange place now, full of upstart cultures who were barely talking in sentences when you were alive. The Phoenicians and Egyptians have changed little – though their Empires have expanded beyond recognition; the others, particularly the Persians who ape your ways and dress in clothes both comfortingly similar and starkly different to your own, are unsettling. Great Empires have risen and fallen since you last walked the earth. None now remember the names of your kings or your Gods. With Hattusilis dead, none speak for Hatti in the halls of power. Your huwasi-stones are torn down and faded by wind and water to smooth nothingness; even the desert places of the Persian empire barely hold scratches where the great inscriptions of your deeds once stood.

At the Twelfth Annual, Hattusilis was assassinated by the Heroes of Atlantis. With him, the last clinging fragment of the Hittite Magisterium was finally extinguished. Every soul protected by his ersatz Underworld was flung helpless into the night, and vanished forever. You, now, are all that remains.

CULTURE

The tales of the Hittites are the tales of a thousand minor Gods. The Romans might boast of their Lares and Penates; they look like generalist amateurs to the discerning Hittite. Every crossroads, river, every village and mountaintop has its own little God, and every Hittite knows the painstaking detail in which one must pay them homage to avoid a hundred tiny retributions at every step. The life of a Hittite commoner was one of constant minor sacrifice and accounting, in an eternal but vain effort to keep these countless minor deities content.

The royal court of Hatti was a Byzantine place of layered bureaucracy and theocracy. You recognise its echoes in the court of Persia and the elaborate priesthood of Egypt; yours was first, of course, and best. The triple administration of the bodyguards, the wine-stewards and the scribes kept the Empire on an even keel and running smoothly; every official of any note was a priest, at least in name, and one could not so much as begin the minutes for a meeting without a ten-minute invocation of the appropriate patron deity. The statues of the Gods were everywhere in the great city of Hattusa, from the Lion Gate to the great enclosure of the Royal Sphinxes (do not listen to the Egyptians; they were your beasts first, and you mastered them as the Nile-dwellers never did).



The chariots of the cavalry – a Hittite invention, copied but never equalled by younger cultures – raced across the royal roads, couriering messages and collecting tribute; the Hittites were a cosmopolitan people, much given to travel within the bounds of their Empire. The Empire imported horses from its allies in the far east, and began a breeding programme which would eventually result in the Nisean line that Persia is now so famous for.

Hittite dress somewhat resembled that of Persia today, but where Persians often adorn themselves in a riot of gaudy colour, Hittites preferred a single base of white, black or a dark block colour, with ornaments in the form of sashes, stripes or shawls in contrasting bright colours and patterns. Veils and headscarves were not common; some warriors adopted high-peaked hats and helmets, but narrow headbands of an inch or two in width were far more common for all genders. Beaded jewellery was popular with soldiers, who sometimes bought a bead at every town they visited on campaign and brought the resulting strings back to their sweethearts. Makeup was a common decoration for all genders, emphasising brows, cheeks and eye-lines. In later years, court dress began to leave one shoulder bare in the fashion of Canaanite nobility, but older Hittites might see this as a degenerate and foreign nonsense. Traditional Hittite armour was lamellar in construction, with the later scale-armour that is still seen in Persia originally the preserve of the wealthy and gaudy.

Hittite names are usually given associated with a profession. It is exceedingly rare for a Hittite to describe themselves simply as “Muwatalis”; to do so suggests that one is a child, a beggar or a criminal. Instead, one would say “Muwatalis the Scribe”, to a casual acquaintance, or more properly, “Muwatalis, second-rank scribe of the Dubsar, of the directorate of accounting for the affairs of Storm-Gods and their progeny”. It is perhaps for this reason that Hattusilis was known so universally as “the Watcher”.

Hittite names tend to be multisyllabic and formed around a consonant-root, much like contemporary Persian names. When written, vowels are usually excluded except by children and the semi-literate; thus “Muwatalis” becomes MWTLS in writing. “-khepa” is a typical feminine suffix, and “-ash” a typical masculine one.

Male names: Esarhaddon, Muwatalis, Nabushezibanni, Shalmeneser, Suppialimash, Tarkondemash, Tudhaliyas, Urhiteshub, Artatama, Tushratta.

Female names: Gilukhepa, Tiya, Taduqhepa, Nabushekhepa, Artakhepa, Puduhepa, Hebat, Estankhepa

Genderless names: Antara, Handayilla, Hilamma, Itkalziya, Karpiwala, Mistiliya, Sarku, Taksulai

GOALS

You are in a terrifyingly vulnerable position, and painfully aware of your looming fate. With no Underworld to call your own, your soul is forfeit; should you die, the oblivion that claimed your fellow Hittites will claim you too – unless you can find a life-raft, some thread to keep you safe; some opportunity to survive and persist. You are a Hittite; you have endured so many deaths – the death of your body, the death of your Gods, the death of your comrades and your protector Hattusilis. Surely there must be some way out of this?

