

RLAKERS

CHIMERA

AN EXCERPT FROM
ATLANTIS
TWILIGHT OF MANKIND



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THE AUTHOR HAS RATED THIS NARRATIVE

RL-18+

INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 18

For descriptive scenes of violence against both animals and humans, frightening portrayals of malevolent supernatural beings, depictions of societal debauchery and human sacrifice, and references to depraved sexual practices and denigration of women.

No part of this story is appropriate for children.



THE PANTHOLON

THE FOUR

S'MAEL	<i>the Stag</i>	god of the forests and all verdant life
R'ZUUS	<i>the Ram</i>	god of the skies and the mountain reaches
M'LAAC	<i>the Bull</i>	god of fulfillment
E'RIIS	<i>the Goat</i>	god of war

THE SIX

H'PHAEST'M	<i>the Chimera</i>	creator god
A'BAAD'N	<i>the Locust</i>	destroyer god
H'KETH'A	<i>the Mandrake</i>	god of procreation
X'NUUB'S	<i>the Hound</i>	god of the dead
B'KSEID'N	<i>the Crocodile</i>	god of the inland sea
R'HAAB'A	<i>the Kraken</i>	god of the greater sea

THE THIRTEEN

G'DEER'L	god of the morning
M'LATH'Z	god of the evening
B'STEM'S	god of the hunt and wild animals
D'NYYS'S	god of crop and vine
S'TARO'T	god of beauty
E'PHEN'X	god of music and poetry
G'BAAL'M	god of storms
D'GAAN'U	god of fertility
Y'NCUUB'S	god of seduction
I'THIN'I	god of knowledge
V'LAAB'C	god of riddles
M'THEM'T	god of order
L'TEET'M	god of chaos

THE CALENDAR

SEASON OF COLOR

First Moon	<i>30 days</i>
Bitter Moon	<i>29 days</i>
Dream Moon	<i>30 days</i>

SEASON OF TWILIGHT

Kestrel Moon	<i>29 days</i>
Wet Moon	<i>30 days</i>
Bull Moon	<i>29 days</i>

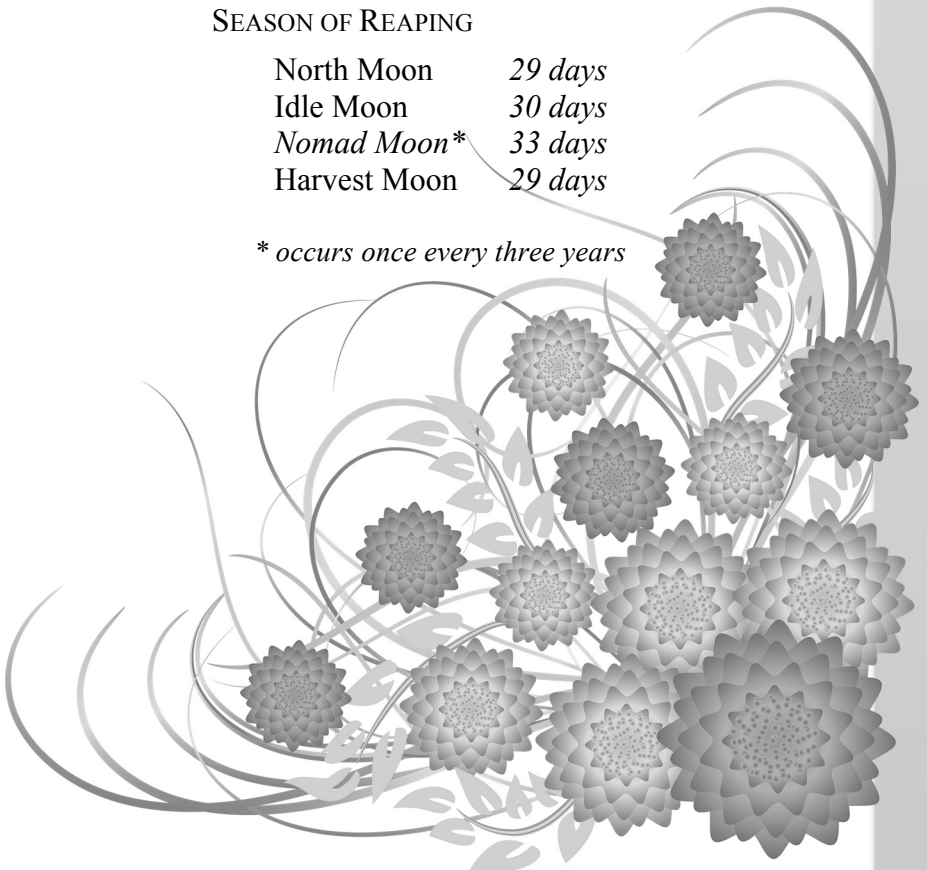
SEASON OF SOWING

Spring Moon	<i>30 days</i>
Bright Moon	<i>29 days</i>
Blade Moon	<i>30 days</i>

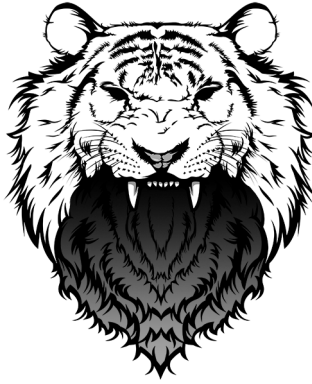
SEASON OF REAPING

North Moon	<i>29 days</i>
Idle Moon	<i>30 days</i>
<i>Nomad Moon*</i>	<i>33 days</i>
Harvest Moon	<i>29 days</i>

** occurs once every three years*



CHAPTER SIX



H'PHAEST'M was something of an oddity among the gods. One of the Six, he nonetheless stood outside the normal power structure of the Pantholon. His unique talents were in demand by all of the others, and thus he had managed to carve out a niche for himself in City politics; he remained at the heart of things, without paying tribute to any one of the Four.

He was... unusual.

He alone among the gods was indifferent to the worship of mortals. He was architect, inventor, creator—*programmer*, as he preferred to style himself. He exercised power in the form of direct control over nature.

H'PHAEST'M's compound was situated on the west bank of the isle proper, hewn equally from the territory claimed by R'ZUUS and E'RIIS. The god maintained only minimal household staff, but upon entering his palace, D'Akaio was greeted by a majordomo who showed him to the laboratory complex deep below ground. The sounds of animals in captivity rose to meet his ears as they spiraled down a chiseled stone staircase, the noise growing louder the deeper they descended. Most of the roaring and screeching was probably natural, but to D'Akaio's ear, some of the cries seemed agonized—as if the creatures' very existence was an inescapable torture. The steward delivered D'Akaio to the

laboratory, then turned and disappeared up the staircase, having never said a single word.

D'Akaio found H'PHAEST'M leaned over a large stone table, the god's hands thrust into the abdomen of what appeared to be a young horse. The creature wasn't moving, and at first, D'Akaio assumed it was dead—that the god was performing some sort of autopsy, accessing the beast's internal organs through incisions in its belly. But no... as D'Akaio looked closer, he realized the foal was still breathing softly, its belly unmarked; H'PHAEST'M was simply reaching *through* the creature's skin, his hands blurring to black mist where they disappeared.

The sight of it was unsettling.

[[D'Akaio, Favorite of R'ZUUS,]] the god intoned, without looking up from his work. Unlike the other gods, when H'PHAEST'M spoke, it sounded natural—more like a man and less like a force of nature. His lips even aligned with the words he spoke, as if his mouth were actually forming the sounds.

Despite being himself the son of a god, D'Akaio was not exempt from that moment of dread every mortal felt when becoming the focus of a god's attention. The gods were intimidating by their very nature. And yet while most of the Pantholon encouraged this sort of reaction, H'PHAEST'M's lack of interest in worship made him almost approachable by comparison. Less fearful than he probably should have been, D'Akaio stepped closer to the operating table. Momentarily forgetting the purpose of his visit, his attention was arrested by the image of the sedated creature, its chest rising and falling, rising and falling, while H'PHAEST'M did... *something*... inside of it.

The god smiled slightly, no doubt sensing D'Akaio's curiosity, though he had yet to look up from his work. [[Embedded within every mortal creature is a... a code, for lack of a better word.]]

D'Akaio stared blankly.

[[Like a sequence of letters or numbers.]] H'PHAEST'M frowned slightly, eyes fixed on something only he could see. [[By changing some of those values, I can make changes in the physiology of the creature.]]

"Physiology... You mean you can change its body?"

The god nodded distractedly.

D'Akaio had heard something of this, after all.

H'PHAEST'M's creations had brought him a great deal of notoriety; rather than react with jealousy, the other gods only encouraged his fame by commissioning him to create specific works of living art. But what, exactly, was H'PHAEST'M capable of? "You say you can change its body... In what way? Add extra legs? Remove its head?"

H'PHAEST'M looked annoyed. [[Adding something as complex as an appendage is difficult. It ties into so many systems: skeletal, muscular, nervous... Too many things go wrong when such changes are attempted. And vital body parts cannot simply be removed.]] He paused, his expression of annoyance deepening to a scowl as he worked. [[If I add something, it must be simple: dead growth, like hair, claw, or horn. Replacing is easier; coding the head of a bull onto the body of a man, for instance. Most of the nerve and control linkages already exist, though they don't always connect perfectly...]] He trailed off, newly distracted.

D'Akaio found himself sickly fascinated. "And right now? What change are you making?"

[[Adding a horn... dead growth, as I said. Center of the forehead.]] The god shifted position, without removing his hands. [[The basic structure comes from code I found in the rhinokeros sequence, but I've made several modifications. This is my third iteration.]] He smirked. [[I get a little closer each time...]]

The strange conversation died as H'PHAEST'M focused harder on his work, the muscles of his arms shifting subtly as he visibly 'tinkered' within the supine creature.

"Why a horned horse?" D'Akaio asked finally.

H'PHAEST'M's lip twitched. [[M'LAACK desires one for some purpose. Or rather, four of them—a matched set. And...]] the god smiled triumphantly, [[that should do it.]] He pulled his hands out of the foal's belly, leaving no mark that they had ever entered. [[I call the new species 'equukeros.']]

D'Akaio waited expectantly... but there was no change. "Nothing's happening."

H'PHAEST'M burst into laughter, sounding genuinely entertained. [[You won't see the horn on *this* beast. But the changes I've made will replicate to its children.]] His laughter abated. [[Though not to its children's children. I have yet to figure out the problem there; it seems that any change I make also sterilizes the resulting specimen.]]

"I don't understand. Why do your changes to the mother only carry to the next generation?"

[[Because it is not the mother I am changing. My modifications are to the eggs she carries within her.]]

D'Akaio stared, then it was his turn to laugh. "Horses don't lay eggs." Clearly, the god was having fun at his expense.

H'PHAEST'M's face hardened, and D'Akaio cursed himself. True, H'PHAEST'M was more approachable than any of the other gods, but he was still a god. [[You know nothing of which you speak, little one,]] the god said simply, all trace of informality gone from their interview. [[Now tell me: what does your father wish of me?]]

D'Akaio hurriedly produced the scroll, handing it over. H'PHAEST'M broke the seal and stepped to an unused table nearby, spreading the pages across its surface and weighing down the corners with various implements. He was soon completely absorbed by the drawings.

It was clear that D'Akaio himself had been forgotten... so he quietly stepped forward to see what the pages contained.

He had expected something along the lines of M'LAAK's 'equukeros,' but it was immediately clear this was a construction project of some kind. Straight lines formed geometric shapes on the expensive parchment, most empty spaces occupied by words scribbled in an unfamiliar script.

[[A temple,]] H'PHAEST'M breathed, almost in awe. [[But... the scale of it...]] He shook his head idly, and D'Akaio was unsure if the god spoke to him or to himself. [[A project of this magnitude... the perfection required... Simply moving and placing such immense blocks...]] He rounded on D'Akaio. [[I would need an entire corps of Eidolon. Mere humans would not do.]]

"I..." D'Akaio blinked. "I will tell him."

[[But *where*?]] H'PHAEST'M asked absently, not focused on D'Akaio at all. [[A structure so immense... Outside the City?]] He spun back to the table, began flipping impatiently through the plans. [[There must be a survey here somewhere...]] He stopped. [[Ah. Of course...]]

Whatever it was the god had gleaned from this page of the drawings, it was beyond D'Akaio's ability to comprehend. Nevertheless, it caused a smile to spread slowly across H'PHAEST'M's face. He turned and seemed mildly surprised to find the demigod still standing there. He raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"Uh... my father said I should bring him your answer."

The god's brows smoothed, his smile broadening. [[In that case, tell R'ZUUS I am quite interested. Quite interested indeed.]]

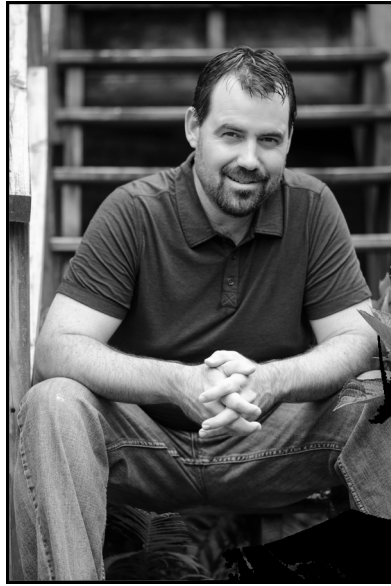
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DEGEORGE PHOTOGRAPHY

R.L. Akers loves stories. He loves hearing them, loves telling them, loves embellishing them, and loves forging them from raw materials. He is convinced that every person who ever lived has an interesting story, and he's only met one person in his life who came close to proving otherwise.

Holder of an undergraduate degree in computer science and a master's degree in business administration, Akers has worked in software development as well as non-profit fundraising and publicity. His love for children has led him in the past to be a foster parent and a coordinator of the K-5 ministry at his church, and he currently invests time each week in the lives of local high schoolers. His interests include graphic design, orchestral movie soundtracks, and anything remotely creative.

Akers lives in West Virginia with his wife Sarah and the four children he loves most in this world. Visit him online at RLAkers.com.